Persian Masters
five centuries of painting

Edited by Sheila R. Canby

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I am also grateful to Pratapaditya Pal, Senior Curator of Indian and Southeast Asian Art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, for proposing that I edit this volume.

I wish to express my gratitude to Francesca Galloway and Simon Ray of Spink and Son Ltd., London, Shaykha Hussa al-Sabah and Ghada Qaddumi of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, Kuwait National Museum, and Edmund de Unger for their generous response to my request for photographs.

Finally, I must thank the contributors who have produced thought-provoking articles of the highest calibre despite the many responsibilities of their busy careers. By their efforts they have enriched the body of knowledge and shed new light on some of the world's greatest artists, the painters of Persia.

Sheila R. Canby
London



Introduction

Sheila R. Canby

"It is etched on the minds of the masters of the arcane that the garden of painting and illumination is an orchard of perfect adornment. . . ."

Dust Muhammad, Preface to the Bahram Mirza Album, from W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 343.

In the West the study of art history, and painting in particular, has traditionally centred on individual artists and their schools. From Vasari to Berenson, scholars have sought to define the art of specific places and times in terms of known artists and their followers. Even when the identity of a painter is unknown, scholars have satisfied the desire to name those responsible for great works of art by calling them the "Master of" a particular painting or workshop. Perhaps in reaction to the emphasis on the attribution of works of art, art historians more recently have turned their attention to the social and political context in which works of art were produced. However, one can still argue that the individual artist remains the prime determinant in how a work will look and how it will differ from works by other artists of the same period and locale.

The supremacy of calligraphy over painting in Arab and Iranian culture has resulted in Persian biographers concentrating more on calligraphers than on painters. Nonetheless, the accounts of several biographers—Mirza Muhammad Haydar Dughlat, Dust Muhammad, Qadi Ahmad, Sadiqi Beg, Iskandar Beg Munshi (see Further Reading)—contain enough information on the artists of the Timurid (1370-1506) and Safavid (1501-1732) periods to provide modern art historians with some of the tools necessary for attributing works to specific artists and for connecting the verbal descriptions of the artists in the sources with their visual output.

The present volume is only the most recent link in the chain of accounts and analyses devoted to Persian painters and their *oeuvre*. In this century art historians have increasingly refined the definitions of schools and styles of Persian painting as more paintings have come to light. Without the groundwork laid by scholars such as F. R. Martin, Eric Schroeder, Ivan Stchoukine, Basil Gray, B. W. Robinson, Stuart Cary Welch, Eleanor Sims and Ernst Grube, to name a few, our knowledge of the

identities and works of individual Persian artists would be impoverished. Whether one confirms or questions the judgements of these authorities, one cannot avoid referring to their books and articles. As a glance at the notes of each article in this volume attests, the work of the aforementioned scholars is the springboard for much of what is discussed here. Nevertheless, the writers of the articles in this issue not only present a fresh look at painters previously considered elsewhere but also draw new conclusions concerning them.

Textual information on Persian painters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is sparse and often difficult to match with existing works of art. Thus, as B. W. Robinson demonstrates in his article on Pir Ahmad Baghshimali, the case for the artist must be made by painstakingly examining the manuscripts which could be expected to contain paintings by the artist. From a reconstruction of hallmarks in the artist's life Robinson convincingly identifies a body of work attributable to Pir Ahmad Baghshimali.

The study of later fifteenth-century artists is both enhanced and confused by a larger number of literary references and extant works, a fair number of which bear signatures or attributions. The inscription "Muhammad Siyah Qalam" on a large, varied group of fifteenth-century paintings has resulted in the false assumption that an individual artist was responsible for all these paintings. As J. M. Rogers shows, "Siyah Qalam" is more fittingly used as a descriptive term for a particular technique or in its broadest interpretation for a body of late fifteenth-century Persian paintings. Likewise, Bihzad, the most renowned of late fifteenth-century Persian painters, has suffered from too much fame and admiration. Attributions to him abound, but exceedingly few works are universally accepted as his. Progressing beyond knotty questions of attribution, Thomas Lentz treats Bihzad as the paradigm of the new style of painting that developed in the late fifteenth century but whose influence was felt well into the sixteenth century in both Iran and India.

The Houghton Shahnameh by Martin B. Dickson and Stuart Cary Welch (Cambridge, MA, 1981) is the most thorough attempt to identify the artists active at the court of the Safavid Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76) and to define and differentiate their styles. The reinterpretation of information brought to light by Dickson and Welch or connected with their subject,forms the basis of three of the articles in this issue. First, Priscilla Soucek's most enlightening article on Sultan Muhammad addresses the question of patronage. Because the study of Mir Sayyid 'Ali, a painter at the courts of Shah Tahmasp and the Mughal emperors Humayun and Akbar, rests on a core of firmly attributed works and reliable literary references, Anthony Welch can concentrate in his article on how the artist's style reflects his personality and on the impact of Mir Sayyid 'Ali on Mughal painting. Finally, as with Sultan Muhammad, the work of the Safavid artist Shaykh-Muhammad is reassessed by Marianna Shreve Simpson in the light of her recent and ongoing study of a major manuscript, a *Haft Aurang* of Jami, containing works attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad.

The problems associated with late sixteenth-and seventeenth-century Persian painters differ markedly from those one encounters with earlier artists. While the literary sources may not reveal much more about these figures than they did about their earlier counterparts, many more signed works are extant. Thus, in my article on Riza in this issue I could base my discussion of one aspect of the artist's personal iconography on a range of works spanning a forty-year period. Similarly, Massumeh Farhad's focus on the journalistic aspects of Mu'in Musavvir's work is feasible

because of the increased amount of written information that he inscribed on his works. The final article in the volume, Maryam Ekhtiar's study of the Qajar lacquer painter, Muhammad Isma'il Isfaḥani, reveals the continuing fascination of Persian painters with visual documentation of historical events and personages despite the relatively new medium of lacquer.

Over the five centuries to which the painters considered here belong, the style and subject-matter of Persian painting changed dramatically. The early artists emerge from their cloak of anonymity only with the most patient art-historical coaxing, aided by a careful review of the literary and historical sources. With the increasing appearance of signatures and, more often, attributions in late fifteenth-century painting, problems of authenticity loom large. While connoisseurship remains an important aspect of defining the style of Safavid artists, their lives and characters are relatively well-documented. Thus, scholars aim for precise identification of the patrons for whom and places in which these artists worked. With later Safavid and Qajar artists one is confronted with a more extensive body of work and a greater range of subject-matter than in the *oeuvre* of earlier painters. Thus, one must ask a different set of questions about why such-and-such an artist painted such-and-such a picture. Despite the various dictates that the study of each period or school presents, the individuals who peopled these times and ateliers remain of paramount importance. No matter how influential a patron or a milieu, the unique, human element of painting resides first in the hands of the painter. The collection of Persian painters presented here is truly a garden of perfect adornment, each artist as fruitful and stimulating as the next.

NB Transliteration from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish has been left to contributors so that systems are consistent within each article but vary from one article to the next. Technical limitations have resulted in the omission of diacritical marks.

'Zenith of his Time': The Painter Pir Ahmad Baghshimali

To the memory of Eric Schroeder

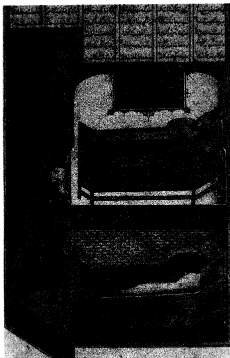
B.W. Robinson

Throughout the first two centuries of the history of Persian painting, the student is confronted on the one hand with an exceptionally rich and varied range of original material, and on the other with a painfully meagre sprinkling of literary references, sometimes of dubious credibility and often confined to fulsome but uninformative eulogy. It was not till the end of the Timurid period that the artists began to make a practice of signing their work (very rarely at first) and the writers to retail biographical and circumstantial information in reasonable quantity.

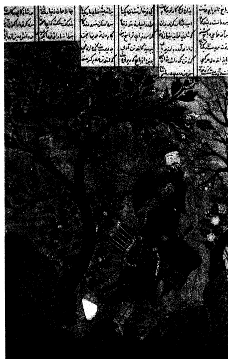
In the earlier period, then, faced with a mass of paintings and little more than a handful of names, we can either follow the cautious scholar in disregarding the latter and treating all the material as anonymous, or we can take the bolder course of attempting to correlate certain groups of paintings with certain names to which a few scraps of information have become attached, and which seem to fit the paintings in question. This latter procedure is certainly the more attractive, though dealing largely in hypothesis, because the impact of a painting is considerably enhanced if we can associate it with some definite painter whose career and character the literary sources enable us, however dimly, to envisage; and we can thus put a human face on what might otherwise become a dry exercise in art-historical technique. The present article attempts to deal in this way with the problematical painter Pir Ahmad Baghshimali. It will thus follow the lead of Eric Schroeder (to whom we shall return before long), who wrote: "I regard it as desirable to embrace Dust Muhammad's all-important account of early painting, and the monuments of early painting, in a hypothetical structure which may be subjected to test or improvement. And I regard it as convenient to associate a peculiar group of first-rank paintings with the name of an artist, even though the association be only probable, in the radical meaning of the word."[1]

Our literary sources on Pir Ahmad Baghshimali are of the slenderest. They are, in fact, confined to a brief statement by Dust Muhammad in his preface to the album of Bahram Mirza (Topkapi, H. 2154): "Another [pupil of Shams al-Din] was Pir Ahmad Baghshimali, the zenith of his time. No one could rival him. He reached the age of fifty."[2] But this bald statement may be augmented by judicious deduction. In Dust Muhammad's text it is sandwiched between, on the one hand, notices of 'Abd al-Hayy and Junayd, senior pupils of Shams al-Din at the court of Sultan Ahmad Jalayr in the





2. "Bahman in Rustam's family vault." 1397. The British Library, London, Or. 2780, fol. 171b.



3. "A warrior on Mount Damavand." 1397. The British Library, London, Or. 2780, fol. 213.

1. "Garshasp visiting the Brahmans." 1397. The British, Library, London, Or. 2780, fol. 14b.

1390s, and, on the other, an account of how Baysunghur Mirza gathered his library staff in the 1420s. In the interval thus left, *c.* 1400-20 (and Dust Muhammad's account is chronological), the only prince we can envisage as patronizing "the zenith of his time" is surely the short-lived (1384-1414) Iskandar Sultan b. 'Umar Shaykh; he was Timur's wayward grandson and one of the most lavish and discerning patrons in the history of Persian painting. The placing of Dust Muhammad's statement on him must therefore imply the probability that Pir Ahmad worked for Iskandar Sultan, a conclusion reached by Schroeder on the same grounds.

Pir Ahmad's sobriquet, Baghshimali, may also perhaps provide a clue to further information. In 1397, as we are informed by Timur's fawning biographer Sharaf al-Din



4. Mounted fragments of marginal paintings. *c.* 1405. The British Museum, London, 1958-7-12-025.

Yazdi,[3] the great conquerer built a palace surrounded with gardens to the north of Samarkand. It was named Bagh-i Shimal (Northern Garden), and was dedicated to his granddaughter Baghisi Sultan, daughter of Mirza Miranshah, whom Iskandar Sultan had married the previous year. The walls were lavishly adorned with paintings by "the most skilful painters from Persia and Baghdad," which the writer declares were far superior to the works of the legendary Mani and to the murals in the Chinese imperial palace. The subjects of these paintings, as we learn from Ibn 'Arabshah, a less flattering biographer,[4] were court scenes, hunts, battles, and portraits. They were in effect, as Stchoukine points out, simply enlarged miniatures, like those executed for Shah 'Abbas at Isfahan two centuries later.

The coincidence of the artist's sobriquet with the name of the palace[5] is too striking and unusual to be fortuitous, and we may well be justified in inferring that he was one of the painters—perhaps even the leading painter—employed on the murals, although his senior, 'Abd al-Hayy, seems to have been in charge of the whole operation. Probably not long afterwards the latter became a religious recluse and destroyed as many of his own works as he could lay his hands on, as related by Mirza Haydar Dughlat.[6] This would have left Pir Ahmad Baghshimali at the head of his profession, and it would not be surprising if Iskandar Sultan's keen artistic perception quickly picked him out as a brilliant recruit to his *kitab-khana* (royal library *cum* artists' workshop). To whom else would he go? Timur had finished building and, being illiterate (as Ibn 'Arabshah tells us), was not interested in fine illuminated manuscripts; Shah Rukh had literary tastes, chiefly in the direction of history, but his artistic inclinations, so far as



5. "The sirens on the sea-shore observed by Iskandar." *c.* 1405. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva (Donation Pozzi).



6. "The magic spring." *c.* 1405. Private Collection.

we can judge, were not pronounced; and Baysunghur Mirza was still a mere infant (b. 1400; the earliest manuscript dedicated to him seems to be the historical manual *Tabaqat i Nasiri* of 814/1412).[7]

There is reason to believe that Pir Ahmad entered the service of Shah Rukh after the fall of Iskandar Sultan in 1414. A magnificent manuscript compendium of Hafiz-i Abru's historical writings (Topkapi, B. 282)[8] contains miniatures apparently by him, together with a dedication to Shah Rukh (fol. 10a) and two chronograms giving the dates 818/1415 (fol. 296a) and 819/1416 (fol. 652a). These may have constituted his last work, and if we accept Dust Muhammad's statement that he lived till the age of fifty, we may suppose that he was born *c.* 1370. He would thus have been in the prime of life when the Bagh-i Shimal palace was built and decorated. His work strongly influenced that of Baysunghur's academy.



7. "The prince encountering a lady by a stream." 1408. Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 796, fol. 75a.



8. "Adam and Eve." 1410. Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, LA 1617.

So the points we have established, as possibilities, are:

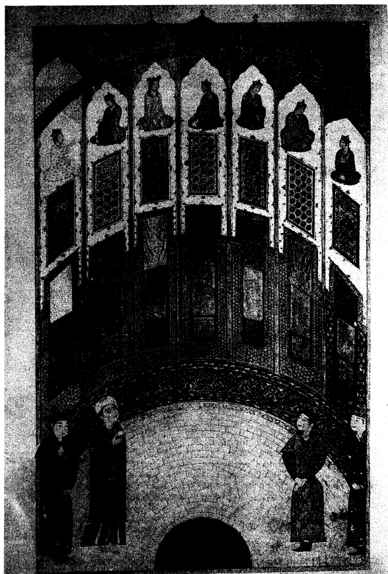
(i) Born *c.* 1370, Pir Ahmad became a pupil of Shams al-Din at Baghdad under Sultan Ahmad Jalayr; his senior fellow-pupils were 'Abd al-Hayy and Junayd.[9]

(ii) When Timur took Baghdad in 1393 Pir Ahmad was probably transported, along with 'Abd al-Hayy, to Samarkand, where it is likely that he contributed to the murals in the Bagh-i Shimal palace in 1397.

(iii) After Timur's death (1405), or perhaps before, he entered the *kitab-khana* of Iskandar Sultan, in which he became the dominant figure.

(iv) After the fall of Iskandar (1414) he enjoyed the patronage of Shah Rukh, and died *c.* 1420.

9. "Bahram Gur and the portraits of the Seven Princesses." 1410. Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, LA 1617.



Pir Ahmad Baghshimali has hardly been noticed by Western writers. Eric Schroeder is the only one who has attempted to match Dust Muhammad's encomium with an actual surviving painting, namely the fine miniature of Rustam and his bride Tahmina in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University.[10] This is certainly a feasible proposition, but unfortunately Schroeder goes on to attribute to him the miniatures in the Tehran *Kalila wa Dimna*, then (1942) generally accepted as an early fifteenth-century manuscript, but since regarded as a product of the patronage of the Black Sheep Turkman prince Pir Budaq, some fifty years later.[11] Pir Ahmad is mentioned neither by Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray (except in their Appendix I, which gives a translation of Dust Muhammad's preface), nor by Gray in his Skira book of 1961, and Stchoukine (1954) mentions him only in brushing aside Schroeder's hypothesis ("L'attribution . . . faite sans raison valable" and "l'hypothèse de l'auteur américain ne saurait être acceptée à moins de nouvelle preuve").[12] But Schroeder had more real insight into Persian painting than many of his contemporaries, and was not afraid of publishing his opinions; in the present instance his hypothesis, so far as it goes, is quite tenable. In a case of this kind definite proof is not, and probably never will be, possible, and definite proof is, of course, what is required by the cautious scholar before he will commit himself in any way.

Bearing in mind the points established above, let us now look at the surviving works we are inclined to attribute to Pir Ahmad Baghshimali on grounds of style. The style we associate with him is directly derived from the Jalayrid school of Baghdad, to which it conforms in most respects. But in the hands of Pir Ahmad the slim attenuated figures, so characteristic of the work of 'Abd al-Hayy and Junayd, become shorter and fuller, the faces in particular being full and rounded. His compositions are not as large and crowded as those of his Baghdad associates. His treatment is generally original and always effective. He occasionally displays a quiet sense of humour, and he has a curious idiosyncrasy of placing the crowns on the heads of princes at a slight angle.

1

800/1397 (Shiraz). Two volumes of epics: (i) The *Garshasp Nama* and others, British Library, Or. 2780, with 11 miniatures; and (ii) The *Shahnama*, Chester Beatty Library, MS 114, with 5 miniatures. These volumes were formerly in the possession of the Comte de Gobineau; Schroeder claimed that they formed part of Timur's library. 25.4 x 16.5 cm.[13] (Figs. 1, 2, 3).

Iskandar Sultan was at Shiraz 1394-99, deputizing as governor for his father 'Umar Shaykh; the type of illumination in these manuscripts (close gold arabesques, unoutlined) is a characteristic Shiraz feature going back to the Muzaffarids; the manuscripts themselves are of royal quality. It seems highly likely, then, that they were produced at Shiraz for the young prince, then a boy of thirteen. The miniatures appear to be the work of a single painter, and their style (including crowns set at an angle) suggests an attribution to Pir Ahmad. He has here broadened considerably the Jalayrid style in which he had been trained, perhaps as a result of recent work on the murals of the Bagh-i Shimal palace.

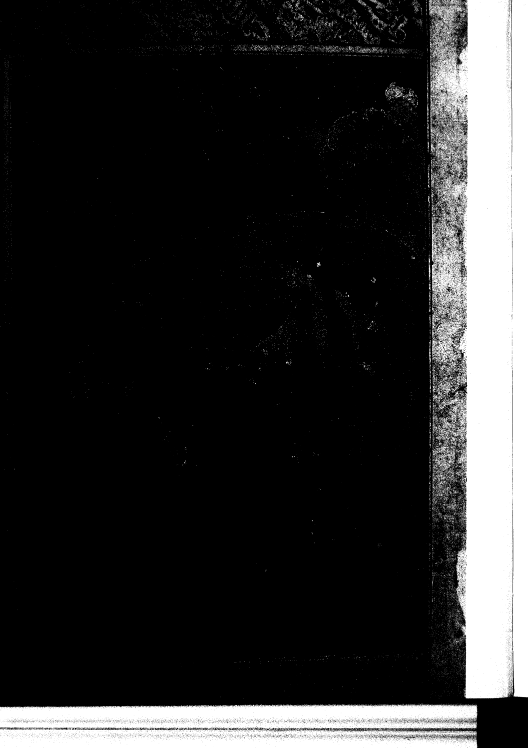
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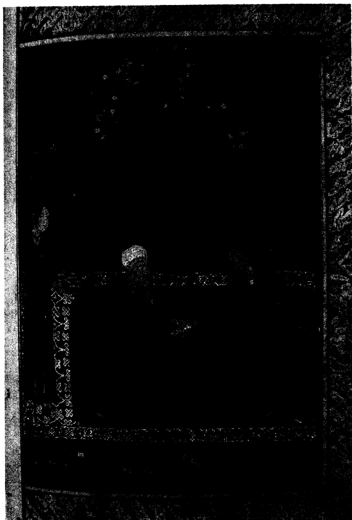
c. 1405 (Yazd?). *Iskandar Nama* of Nizami, a small pocket copy, fragmentary and badly damaged, British Museum, 1958-7-12-025, with 3 almost full-page miniatures and



10. "Astronomers in the Maragha observatory." 1410. Istanbul University Library, F. 1418.

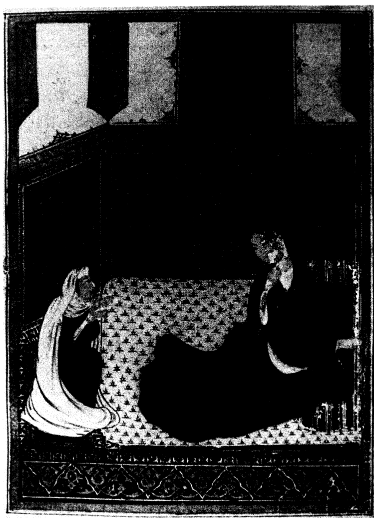
11. "Humay killing the demon-sorcerer." 1410-11. The British Library, London, Add. 27261, fol. 300a.





12. "The sirens on the shore observed by Iskandar." 1410-11. The British Library, London, Add. 27261, fol. 286a.

13. "Physician and patient." 1410-11. The British Library, London, Add. 27261, fol. 371b.



14. "The lady Hind receiving a message." *c.* 1412. Formerly in the library of the Marquess of Bute, fol. 27b.



15. "Magical and astrological figures." 1413. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, B. 411, fol. 159b.

more than 33 small ones in the outer margins (some of the latter separately mounted). Formerly in the collection of the late Mr J. C. French. 10 x 6.3 cm.[14] (Fig. 4).

The full-page paintings in this little volume are the work of a regular court painter, probably of the older generation, who evidently found it difficult to adjust himself to such a small scale. The small marginal miniatures, however, consisting usually of just one or two figures on a plain background, partially concealed by the text, are full of originality and wit. The way they are drawn and the crowns sometimes set at an angle, incline one to attribute them to Pīr Ahmad Baghshimali. A pocket anthology of the same period in the Malek Library, Tehran, MS 5932, contains similar little paintings, but they seem to be the work of a slightly inferior hand.

3

c. 1405 (Yazd?). *'Aja'ib al-Makhluqat* of Qazwini, another pocket volume of almost the same dimensions as the preceding one, from which only 3 detached miniatures are known to have survived. Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva (Donation Pozzi); and private collection. 8.8 x 5.6 cm.[15] (Figs. 5, 6).

The Geneva miniature representing the sirens on the sea-shore as centaurs, is the most remarkable and best preserved. In all 3, the originality of treatment and the drawing of the faces suggest the hand of Pir Ahmad.

4

810/1408 (Yazd). Anthology copied "at Yazd," where Iskandar Sultan was established at the time. Topkapi, H. 796, with 16 miniatures. 26 x 18 cm.[16] (Fig. 7).

At least three different artists were apparently employed on this manuscript, but five of the miniatures, on ff. 75a, 136b, 138a, 155b, and 170a, display the characteristics and style we have been associating with Pir Ahmad.

5

813/1410 (Shiraz?). Anthology, known as the Gulbenkian (formerly Yates Thompson) Anthology, Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon, LA 1617, with 38 miniatures and a dedication to Iskandar Sultan. 27.3 x 17.8 cm.[17] (Figs. 8, 9).

This manuscript, the largest produced for Iskandar Sultan, was probably copied at Shiraz, and is rightly described by Sakisian as "un des plus anciens et des plus beaux manuscrits timurides." It suffered an appalling tragedy some years ago when the cellar in which it was stored became flooded, resulting in most of the colour being washed off the miniatures. As they have now been repainted, it is no longer possible to cite them as evidence in our present enquiry. But so far as one may judge from reproductions published before the disaster, several of the miniatures show the characteristics we are inclined to associate with Pir Ahmad. Especially notable are those of Bahram Gur in the chamber adorned with portraits of the Seven Princesses—a highly original conception of this subject, with characteristic figures—and Adam and Eve, with its breadth of treatment and large figures reminiscent of the epics of 1397. One can easily imagine the latter as a mural.

6

813/1410 (Shiraz). Horoscope of Iskandar Sultan, Wellcome Institute Library, London, with 1 magnificent double-page miniature depicting the circle of the heavens with the planets and signs of the zodiac in their positions at the birth of Iskandar Sultan in 1384.[18] A similar miniature, larger and perhaps rather later, is in the Topkapi album H.2154, ff. 164b, 165a.[19]

7

813/1410 (Shiraz). Astronomical work, Istanbul University Library, F. 1418, with 1 full-page miniature showing Nasr al-Din Tusi and his colleagues at work in the Maragha observatory.[20] The combination of originality of subject and characteristic figure drawing makes this a promising candidate for attribution to Pir Ahmad. (Fig. 10).

8

813-14/1410-11 (Shiraz). Miscellany, British Library, Add. 27261, with 21 miniatures and some marginal drawings. Dedication to Iskandar Sultan. This is one of the manuscripts brought back by Sir John Malcolm, British Envoy at the court of Fath 'Ali Shah. 18.4 x 12.7 cm.[21] (Figs. 11, 12, 13).

The heterogeneous text of this celebrated manuscript has been described as a veritable pocket library, and the miniatures similarly provide a comprehensive survey of early

Timurid court painting; many of the compositions are found, with little or no modification, in various manuscripts throughout the ensuing century. Dr Stchoukine[22] detected the hands of at least five different artists in these paintings, but this seems unnecessarily divisive. They appear on the whole to be homogeneous and to display the qualities and characteristics that suggest the hand of Pir Ahmad. Towards the end of the volume a number of pages have their margins embellished with exquisite tinted drawings. The figures these contain lead to the conclusion that they too are the work of our artist, who thus established the practice originated by his first patron, Sultan Ahmad Jalayr, in his own *Diwan* of 1402, now in the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington.

9

c. 1412 (Shiraz). Two *mathnawi* poems: (i) *Nawruz u Gul*, by the Shirazi poet Jalal Tabib; and (ii) *Bishr u Hind*, ascribed in the colophon to the otherwise unknown poet Khatir al-Din. 4 miniatures. Formerly in the library of the Marquess of Bute; present whereabouts unknown. 13 x 9 cm.[23] (Fig. 14).

The first of these poems was written in 1334, and was the prototype of a Turki version of the story by Lutfi, which was dedicated to Iskandar Sultan in 1412; this may well have been the occasion of the present manuscript being commissioned. The miniatures are relatively simple, and close parallels to them may be found in the British Library Miscellany (Figs. 11, 12, 13). They may thus be included in the group we have been associating with Pir Ahmad Baghshimali.

10

816/1413 (Isfahan). 28 folios of a large encyclopaedic work, copied "at Isfahan" and with a dedication to Iskandar Sultan, now bound into Topkapi album B.411.[24] (Fig. 15).

A page of tinted drawings, comprising 13 figures or groups, human and animal, magical and astrological (fol. 159b), is in the best court style of Iskandar Sultan, inviting attribution to Pir Ahmad (though there is a later Turkish attribution to a certain Shaykh Wardi). On folio 161b are three small drawings illustrating passages of verse; they are of high quality, but the style is more akin to that of Shiraz under Ibrahim Sultan. Other drawings, not attributable, are of a human skeleton (fol. 138b), a map of the world (ff. 141b, 142a), and a damaged *mi'raj* (fol. 160a).

11

818-19/1415-16 (Herat). Historical compendium (*Kulliyat*) of Hafiz-i Abru, Topkapi, B.282, with 20 miniatures. A large and magnificent manuscript dedicated to Shah Rukh. 42 x 31 cm.[25] (Figs. 16, 17).

About half the number of miniatures may be attributed to Pir Ahmad Baghshimali. Working once more on a large scale, he returns to his broad mural style, well exemplified here by the angels worshipping Adam (fol. 16a), the sacrifice of Isaac (fol. 35b), Yusuf appearing to Zulaykha and her maids (fol. 41a—perhaps the earliest representation of this subject?), and the angel carrying Bilqis Queen of Sheba to visit Solomon (fol. 74a). The figures and faces in the "Pir Ahmad" miniatures are virtually unchanged from his earlier style.

A number of miniatures in the above manuscripts, clearly the work of a single artist, display the characteristics we have already noted as marking the style tentatively associated with Pir Ahmad Baghshimali, and they also demonstrate his outstanding



16. "Yusuf entering the apartment of Zulaykha and her ladies." 1416. Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, B. 282, fol. 41a.



17. "Angels adoring Adam while Satan stands apart." 1416. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, B. 282, fol. 16a.

originality. In the British Library Miscellany he laid down the basic compositions of Nizami illustrations for the remainder of the Timurid period, besides exploiting the novelty of marginal drawings; in the Wellcome horoscope and the Istanbul University astronomical manuscript he tackled subjects never attempted before; and in the little fragmentary *Iskandar Nama* he displayed what amounts to genius in the witty and allusive little figures with which he enlivened the margins.

It is perhaps appropriate at this point (following Schroeder) to draw attention to the mistaken efforts of a number of writers to work these miniatures into what they call the "Shiraz school." Of course many of them did happen to be executed at Shiraz, but they had no direct connection with the local Muzaffarid style of the late fourteenth century, nor with the style that grew out of it under the patronage of Ibrahim Sultan from 1415 onwards. These latter constitute the true Shiraz school. The miniatures produced under Iskandar's patronage, whether at Shiraz, Yazd, Isfahan or elsewhere, represent the metropolitan court style, which began at Baghdad under Sultan Ahmad Jalayr and was shortly to be established at Herat under Baysunghur Mirza. It was not tied to any particular locality, and moved with the residence of the patron prince. It seems to have had little effect on, and was certainly not influenced by, the local styles with which it happened to come in contact.

Two detached miniatures of the highest quality, one of them long famous and the other less widely known, remain to be considered. The first, in the Musée des Arts décoratifs, Paris, shows the Persian prince Humay and the Chinese princess Humayun meeting for the first time in the palace garden, and it is one of the best known of all Persian miniatures.[26] (See figure 7 in Thomas Lentz, "Changing Worlds: Bihzad and the New Painting"). It was exhibited at Munich in 1910, at Paris in 1912, at London (Burlington House) in 1931, and elsewhere; it formed the background (wallpaper?) to Gustav Klimt's portrait of Madame Lippmann, and it has even appeared in a debased form printed on drying-up cloths and upholstery materials. It is comparatively large (29 x 17.5 cm.), and originally adorned a manuscript of Khwaju Kirmani's poems. This manuscript was evidently broken up a long time ago, and no other miniatures from it are known; illuminated headings cut from various parts of the text have been mounted at the top and bottom of the miniature. The garden is enclosed within a decorative scarlet fence silhouetted against a moonlit and starlit sky, and traversed by a little stream bordered by trees and flowers; rose-bushes and other blossoming plants fill almost every inch of space, as Humay, his hands modestly crossed on his breast, confronts the Chinese princess and her two ladies, their scarves and girdles undulating gracefully *à la chinoise.*

Naturally this superb painting has been noticed by most writers on the subject. Martin reproduced it in 1912, dating it to *c.* 1430, and it also appeared in *Meisterwerke* and Marteau-Vever. In 1923 Kühnel placed it about the middle of the fifteenth century, and suggested that it might be the work of Shah Rukh's painter Ghiyath al-Din, who accompanied an embassy to China; but this idea has not found much support. In the *Survey* (1939) he placed it at Herat, *c.* 1430. Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray (1933) agreed with him on Herat, but dated it "probably not later than 1425." In 1948 Basil Gray again located it at Herat, pushing the date back to 1420-25, but in his Skira book of 1961 it is not mentioned.[27] Stchoukine (1954) also puts it at Herat under the patronage of Baysunghur, *c.* 1430.

If, despite the opinions just quoted, we consider it in relation to the works we have tentatively associated with Pir Ahmad Baghshimali, it is certainly larger, far more elaborate and packed with detail, especially in the vegetation; in fact it is far more akin to the 1396 Khwaju Kirmani miniatures. But the faces strongly recall those in the 1397 epics and other manuscripts we have been considering. The figures, on the other hand, are slimmer than those in the latter, yet not as slim as those in the works of 'Abd al-Hayy and Junayd. The manuscript from which this miniature was taken was larger than any of those associated with Iskandar Sultan, who seems to have had a penchant for pocket-size volumes. What can be made of these apparently conflicting facts?

This miniature is unquestionably the work of a great master. Stylistically it cannot be attributed to 'Abd al-Hayy or Junayd, and, *pace* Kühnel and Stchoukine, it appears to be too early to be associated with Baysunghur at Herat. We are left, once more, with an awkward gap, and, as before, there is only one man (so far as we know) capable of filling it: Pir Ahmad Baghshimali. If we accept this idea, the miniature must come early in the artist's career, and was probably executed under the patronage of Sultan Ahmad Jalayr, in view of its similarity in scale and general appearance to the Khwaju manuscript of 1396. If, then, it is indeed attributable to Pir Ahmad, it belongs to the period before he broadened his style for mural work, and when he was still developing the tradition bequeathed to him by Shams al-Din.

The other miniature, in the Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University,[28] represents Tahmina, bride of Rustam and mother of the ill-starred Suhrab, being ushered

by a slave into the bridal chamber where Rustam awaits her. Schroeder had every reason to wax lyrical when he came across this fine miniature among the stock of the New York dealer H. Khan Monif, and acquired it for the Fogg (now Sackler) at a bargain price; he certainly did it proud in his book. But it may be thought that he let his natural exhilaration run away with him in his scornful dismissal of the representation of the same subject in the Royal Asiatic Society's *Shahnama* of *c.* 1440, which is really very good. Certainly the Sackler version is a splendid painting, and Schroeder's opinion that it is the finest surviving portrayal of the subject is shared by Dr M. S. Simpson in her updating of Schroeder's catalogue.[29] As already noted, Schroeder argues strongly for Pir Ahmad Baghshimali as its painter, but Dr Simpson, as a result of correspondence with Mr Robert Skelton, formerly of the Victoria and Albert Museum, seems inclined to accept the latter's suggestion that the damaged inscription above the door includes the name, not of Jalal al-Din Iskandar Sultan as urged by Schroeder, but of 'Ala al-Dawla son of Baysunghur, whom he succeeded in 1433. Though broadly contemporary, the painting itself does not display all the characteristics associated here with Pir Ahmad Baghshimali, and its date, and hence its authorship, must for the present remain matters of speculation.

It may be asked, is an exercise of this kind of any use? Does it advance our knowledge of Persian painting? After all, it is simply a hypothetical construction without solid foundation or proof. An affirmative answer may be given to these questions. Firstly, it introduces controversy, which is in itself a stimulating activity, often leading to clearer perceptions and a wider perspective. Secondly, it has provided a close-knit nucleus of miniatures (to which some may wish to add, and from which others will feel tempted to subtract) of a style so clearly identifiable and characterized by so many quirks and idiosyncrasies of drawing and treatment that they impel one to regard them as the work of a single artist. They include many of the best miniatures of the period in question; Pir Ahmad Baghshimali was certainly at work in this period and was known as "the zenith of his time." It is, then, surely not unreasonable to accept them, provisionally at least, as his, and thus to raise him to his rightful position beside Bihzad, Sultan Muhammad, and Riza-i 'Abbasi in the very front rank of Persian painters.

NOTES

1. E. Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures in the Fogg Museum of Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1942).
2. Quoted in L. Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson and B. Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1933), Appendix I. Dust Muhammad, a court painter of repute at the court of Tahmasp, was commissioned by Prince Bahram Mirza to compile this album to illustrate the history of painting.
3. Quoted in I. Stchoukine, *Les Miniatures des Manuscrits Timurides* (Paris, 1954), p. 4.
4. Quoted in ibid., p. 3.
5. Schroeder connects the name Baghshimali with a suburb of Tabriz; he was apparently not aware of the name of Timur's palace at Samarkand, or he would surely have preferred it as the origin of the artist's additional name.
6. Quoted in Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, p. 190.
7. Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, Petermann I 386 (Pertsch 367). I. Stchoukine et al., *Illuminierte Islamische Handschriften* (Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland XVI) (Wiesbaden, 1971), p. 17 and taf. 13.
8. F. E. Karatay, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi Kütüphanesi: Farsça Yazmalar Kataloğu* (Istanbul, 1961), No. 138; B. Gray, ed., *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th-16th centuries* (Paris/London, 1979), pp. 146, 148, 163 and 309; attention is called to the connection of one group of miniatures in the manuscript with work done for Iskandar Sultan. However, the chronogram dates seem not to have been noticed, and the manuscript is dated "*c.* 1425-33." Later (*Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. VI, p. 862) Mr Gray considered the manuscript to belong to the Turkman period. N. M. Titley, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London: British Library, 1983), fig. 25; Thomas W. Lentz and Glenn D. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, 1989), pp. 132, 166 (Catalogue no. 46) (Referred to as *TPV* in subsequent notes).
9. The most credible attribution to 'Abd al-Hayy is by Dust Muhammad in the Bahram Mirza album (H. 2154), attached to a large and very beautiful miniature of a sleeping youth with angels; see Gray, *The Arts of the Book*,

p. 118. It is very close in style, as one would expect, to the miniatures of Junayd in the celebrated *Khwaju Kirmani* manuscript of 1396 in the British Library (Add. 18113).

10. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, No. 1939.225. Schroeder, *Persian Miniatures,* pp. 51-74; M. Kevorkian and J. P. Sicre, *Les Jardins du Désir* (Paris, 1983), pp. 30-31 (in colour); *TPV,* p. 130 (Catalogue no. 45). This miniature has always been said to come from a manuscript of the *Shahnama*. Certainly the incident depicted occurs in the epic, but the format of the miniature, twice as high as it is wide (20.9 x 10.5 cm.), is not normal for a Timurid *Shahnama* illustration, and the painting may be thought more likely to have come from an anthology.

11. B. W. Robinson, "The Tehran *Kalila wa Dimna*: a Reconsideration" in *Oriental Art* (1958), pp. 3-10; Gray, *The Arts of the Book,* p. 217.

12. Stchoukine, *Les Miniatures,* pp. 8 (note 3), 42.

13. For references see B.W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting from Collections in the British Isles* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1967), No. 10, to which may be added Gray, *The Arts of the Book,* p. 125; Titley, *Persian Miniature Painting,* pl. 3; *TPV,* p. 59 (Catalogue no. 16A and B).

14. B. W. Robinson, "The Earliest Illustrated Manuscript of Nizami?" in *Oriental Art* (Autumn 1957), pp. 96-103; Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting,* No. 11.

15. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting,* No. 12.

16. Karatay, *Topkapi Sarayi Müzesi,* No. 887; I. Stchoukine, "La Peinture à Yazd au début du XVe siècle" in *Syria* XLIII (1966): 99-104 (Figs. 5-8 in this article are attributable to Pir Ahmad); Gray, *The Arts of the Book,* p. 123; F. Cagman and Z. Tanindi, *Topkapi Saray Museum: Islamic Miniature Painting* (Istanbul, 1979), fig. 10; J. M. Rogers, F. Cagman and Z. Tanindi, *The Topkapi Saray Museum: The Albums and Illustrated Manuscripts* (London, 1986), pl. 55; *TPV,* p. 167 (Catalogue no. 59).

17. Yates Thompson, *Illustrations from 100 Manuscripts,* 7 vols. (London, 1907-18), vol. 3, pls. 28-44; F. R. Martin, *Miniatures from the period of Timur* (Vienna, 1926), pls. 14-16; A. Sakisian, *La Miniature persane* (Paris and Brussels, 1929), figs. 44-48; A. U. Pope, ed., *A Survey of Persian Art* (Oxford, 1939), 5: 859-61; B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (Skira, 1961), pp. 74-77, 79; Gray, *The Arts of the Book,* pp. 126, 133; Kevorkian and Sicre, *Les Jardins du Désir,* p. 93.

18. In colour in *Illustrated London News* (Christmas number 1981).

19. E. Kühnel, *Miniaturmalerei im Islamischen Orient* (Berlin, 1923), taf. 41; *TPV,* pp. 145-47 (Catalogue no. 36).

20. Kevorkian and Sicre, *Les Jardins du Désir,* p. 95; *TPV,* p. 148.

21. For references see Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting,* No. 13, to which may be added Gray, *The Arts of the Book,* p. 135, and Titley, *Persian Miniature Painting,* pl. 4; *TPV,* pp. 116, 118 (Catalogue no. 35).

22. Stchoukine, *Les Miniatures,* p. 41.

23. B. W. Robinson, "Two Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the Marquess of Bute" (Part I) in *Oriental Art* (Winter 1971), pp. 1-4.

24. B. W. Robinson, "Persian Painting and the National Epic" in *Proceedings of the British Academy* LXVIII (1982): 275-97, fig. 12; *TPV,* pp. 148-50.

25. See note 8.

26. This miniature has often been reproduced; perhaps the best version is Binyon, Wilkinson and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting,* pl. XLI. See also *TPV,* p. 117 (Catalogue no. 34).

27. B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (London: Iris Colour Books, 1948), p. 12, pl. 5.

28. See note 10.

29. M. S. Simpson, *Arab and Persian Painting in the Fogg Art Museum* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), No. 8.

Siyah Qalam

To the memory of Basil Gray

J.M. Rogers

Largely thanks to Basil Gray's later works,[1] the historical development of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Persian painting first sketched in his seminal catalogue[2] has finally become established. The study of four albums in the Topkapi Saray (H. 2152, 2153, 2160, and to a lesser extent H. 2154), did much to amplify the history of painting as it could be charted from the illustrated book, and demonstrated, notably, the crucial importance of Jala'irid Baghdad and Tabriz (*c.* 1370-1410) for Timurid painting and the importance of Turcoman Tabriz for the development of Safavid painting in the early sixteenth century.

Yet, paradoxically, much of the contents of the albums and their ulterior provenance are still just as much disputed as when they first became known. As regards their immediate provenance, broadly, it seems established that the material (to which other albums are relevant, notably F. 1423, Istanbul University Library, and the Diez albums in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin) arrived in Istanbul no earlier than the 1470s (if so, probably as booty from Mehmed II's victory over the Akkoyunlu Turcomans at Başkent/Otluk Beli in 1473) but more probably as late as 1514 (if so, as booty from Selim I's victory over the Safavids at Çaldiran in that year). They may or may not have been bound on their arrival, but after Çaldiran they were evidently in folders with some form of identification on them; moreover, only a very small proportion of their contents may plausibly be supposed to have been added in Istanbul. They must be made up of the stock of one or more court scriptoria, principally, to judge from the signed calligraphy they contain, Shiraz, Herat and Tabriz. That goes far to explain the extreme diversity of their contents: calligraphy, both signed specimens and chancery documents, as well as pages cut out, apparently at random, from manuscripts of the *Shahname* or of the *Khamse* of Nizami; paintings, some unfinished, including both worked-up parts of scrolls and pages from illustrated books, as well as works in large format which are difficult to associate with books at all; fine paper cuts; sketches or patterns, some of them pounced for copying; and fine worked-up drawings, some of them almost folio size, therefore not intended for book illustration, in black ink but sometimes with wash details. These last, and the paper cuts, were evidently album leaves, of the sort known to have been commissioned for Turcoman court libraries.





1. "A swimming duck," inscribed in *ta'liq*, "*Qalam-i Khwaja* 'Abd al-Hayy *naqqash* [painter], Muhammad b. Mahmudshah al-Khayyam." 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, ink on paper enhanced with gold. 14.4x19.7 cm. Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, Diez A fol. 70 Seite 26/1. This is evidently a copy of an unsigned painting, in gouache on paper, Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 46b, though the dimensions are slightly different. The subject is also related to chinoiserie studies of ducks on silk or gauze in the Hazine albums and other collections. Whether any of these was the work of 'Abd al-Hayy is unknown.

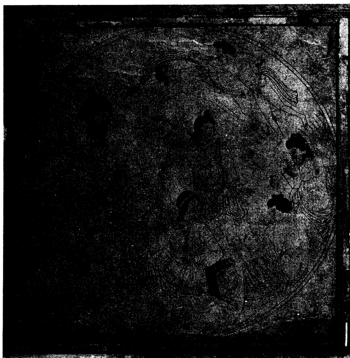
2. "A mounted archer in Mongol costume," signed below in *ta'liq*, "*Qalam-i Kamtarin-i bandagan* [pen of the humblest of the slaves] Muhammad b. Mahmudshah al-Khayyam" and with a scrawled attribution, "Muhammad Khayyam," in a later hand. Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, ink on paper enhanced with gold. 22.4x28.3 cm. Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, Diez A fol. 72 Seite 13. There is another version of the subject, Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2152, fol. 50b.



3. "Immortals in combat," inscribed above, but the wrong way up, in *ta'liq*, "*Naql* [*or naqala*] *az qalam-i* [after the pen of] ustad 'Abd al-Hayy *naqqash kamtarin bandagan* Muhammad b. Mahmudshah al-Khayyam." 15th century. Brush drawing. 19.6x25.9 cm. Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, Diez A fol. 71 Seite 65. There is a reversed and slightly reduced copy in the Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 87a, itself after a Chinese prototype of the Yuan period.

Brilliant, fascinating and rich as these albums are, they had very little influence on the development of sixteenth-century Ottoman painting, and the only Ottoman Sultan who appears to have looked at them is Ahmed I (1603-17). The great *Falname* executed for him by the orders of Kalender Paşa (Topkapi Saray, H. 1703) contains copies of some paintings in the album H. 2153. With Ahmed I can mostly be associated numerous scrawled attributions on certain pages to an "Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam," or just "Muhammad Siyah Qalam," quite possibly in his own hand. It goes without saying that, unlike the calligraphic specimens in the albums, practically none of the paintings and drawings in the albums is signed. Unfortunately, the works thus attributed are of the utmost stylistic diversity, obviously attributable to diverse hands at very different periods. Worse still, not one of the standard Persian or Ottoman histories of painting, by Dust Muhammad, the Qadi Ahmad or Mustafa 'Ali, says anything at all about Muhammad Siyah Qalam.

Zeren Tanindi[3] has observed that one sheet, a line drawing of a camel and a groom



4. "Dionysus, Triptolemus, wind-gods and attendants," with an attribution, possibly 17th century, to "Muhammad Khayyam." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, ink on paper. 16.4x16.4 cm. Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, West Berlin, Diez A fol. 72 Seite 3/2. The drawing is a remarkably exact copy of the famous antique cameo known as the Tazza Farnese first known in Europe in 1471.

(H. 2153, fol. 104b), apparently bears a proper signature, "*mashq-i* Muhammad Siyah Qalam," in a careful *ta'liq*, a script exploited in the chanceries of the Timurid and Turcoman courts. This is not, however, adequate to identify a core group. Notably, it is far from the exotic paintings with which the attribution to Muhammad Siyah Qalam has become particularly associated, variously on worn, unsized paper or on brownish silk, and variously scroll fragments and worked-up paintings of strange or grotesque subjects, demons, wanderers and blacks, in styles and colour schemes difficult otherwise to parallel in the painting of Asia. They are highly naturalistic; gloom and ugliness are not shirked, in total contrast to the great degree of stylization, refinement and polish of later Muslim court painting. The scribbled sobriquet "Siyah Qalam" on these compositions is, moreover, inappropriate. For *siyah qalami*, literally "black pen," is a term used by the sixteenth-century Persian writers on painting for line drawing,

practised as an autonomous genre—though none of the painters they mention is credited with preponderant expertise in it. Such line drawing by the early fifteenth century was already highly esteemed, as witness the exquisite marginal ornament of the *Divan* of Ahmad Jala'ir (Baghdad, *c.* 1410, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington DC, 30.32) and the signed drawing of the camel mentioned above. With these productions the exotic group of "Muhammad Siyah Qalam" paintings has not the slightest connection of style and only the barest correspondence of subject-matter.

Black line drawings in the Istanbul albums bearing *attributions* to "Muhammad Siyah Qalam" may well owe their greater degree of stylistic homogeneity to a common provenance, the Akkoyunlu court at Tabriz. B. W. Robinson[4] has noted numerous correspondences within the group with signed work by the Akkoyunlu painters Shaykhi al-Ya'qubi and Darvish Muhammad. With them should also be compared Muhammad b. Mahmudshah al-Khayyam,[5] for not only does he regularly sign his drawings in a *ta'liq* hand with a characteristic flourish for "Mahmudshah" (Fig. 1), but also his signature, exceptionally, appears on drawings in the albums both in Istanbul and in West Berlin. Several of his extant works, like a study of a mounted archer (Fig. 2), are exact copies of unsigned paintings in the Hazine album, H. 2153. Despite the resultant lack of stylistic homogeneity, however, he may be assigned to the later fifteenth century. He was clearly conscious of working in a tradition, for a signed drawing (Fig. 3) of two Chinese immortals in combat, in some way after a Chinese Yuan original, bears the additional information that it was after (*naql*, or *naqala, az*) a work by 'Abd al-Hayy, who is stated by some sixteenth-century writers to have been carried off from Baghdad by Tamerlane. We know nothing of his work, nor can we even conclude that it was known to Muhammad b. Mahmudshah: it may well be significant that a painting which itself was a copy after a Yuan original is ascribed to him. One of the most interesting of these drawings (Fig. 4), unsigned but with a later attribution to Muhammad al-Khayyam, has been shown to be of the famous antique hard-stone vessel, the Tazza Farnese, now in Naples.[6]

The study of line drawing in the later Muslim cultures of Iran, Central Asia and India demands a treatment on the lines of Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt's corpus of early Italian drawings.[7] We must, however, turn now to the groups of paintings attributed to Muhammad Siyah Qalam which over the past twenty or thirty years have evoked such inconclusive and often implausible speculation.

It is uncomfortable to admit that certain styles are, within the limits of present knowledge, difficult to categorize, either because cultures are hybrid or because the distinctive contribution of external factors may be impossible to assess. For the Siyah Qalam paintings, however, it is even difficult, despite a learned colloquium at the Percival David Foundation in 1980,[8] to suggest a culture to which they might have belonged. True, many of them, though not the gloomy wanderers, show chinoiserie elements; but there is general agreement that despite certain characteristically Chinese stylistic effects in the scroll fragments, notably of demons, they are not of Chinese workmanship, any more than is the "Solomon Romance" on the legend of the Biblical and Koranic patriarch and prophet which they may well have illustrated. The chinoiserie is by itself of no diagnostic value for it permeated the art of the Islamic book at Baghdad, Tabriz, Shiraz and Herat in a succession of waves, from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth century. The attribution to Inner Asia or Mogholistan (Farghana and parts east), though no more plausible, has been curiously tenacious, particularly among Turkish scholars like Toğan, Aslanapa, Ipşiroğlu, Beyhan Karamağarali and the late



5. "Demons rending a horse" (detail), with a scrawled attribution, "*Kar-i* [work of] Muhammad Siyah Qalam." 15th century. Scroll fragment, gouache on silk. 20x49.6 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 40b.

6. "Wanderers, with staves and a cooking pot, a figure riding a donkey and crones following," with a scrawled attribution, "*Kar-i* [work of] Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Line and wash on brownish, unsized paper. 14.4x26.3 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 55a.



Emel Esin. It may be a legacy of the nostalgic pan-Turanianism expounded by early twentieth-century romantic nationalists like Ziya Gökalp in his *Türkçülüğün Esaslari*, or of the romantic orientalism of Strzygowsky and Diez, whose teaching was extremely influential in pre-war and immediately post-war Turkey. The Inner Asian attribution relies heavily upon such shadowy factors as shamanism, Buddhism and ancient Uyghur ethnology and religion, and arbitrarily conflates periods and cultures superimposing them on to the fifteenth century when there is no evidence that they were present at all.[9]

Shamanism in the anthropology of religion covers geographically very different regions and a great variety of beliefs and practices so that it is often difficult to tell what is shamanistic and what is not. Claims for the persistence in folk-religion under Islam of shamanistic practices (whatever these may have been) deriving from the Siberian tribes, the Mongols and possibly the ancient Turks presuppose, moreover, a crude phenomenology of religion where similarities of behaviour (which are often, anyway, exaggerated) are equated with similarities of belief. It is also asserted that this inherited Turcic shamanism was spread by wandering dervishes like the Qalandars,[10] whose behaviour, including their vagrancy, was indeed stigmatized by the Muslim orthodox, though their actual beliefs have rarely if ever been stated. The clean-shaven Qalandars have, however, little in common with the heavily bearded wanderers of the Siyah Qalam paintings. With the Qalandars have been conflated another dervish sect, though not of vagrants, the Yassaviyya, founded by Ahmad Yassavi, whose shrine at Yassi (Gorod Turkestan in Soviet Kazakhstan) was rebuilt on a massive scale by Tamerlane in 1397. This is no evidence for the importance of the Yassaviyya at the time, since his well-documented propensity to patronize dervishes of wild appearance and uncouth behaviour seems usually to have been inconsequential. In fact, the historians of fifteenth-century Central Asia barely mention them; they give no grounds for the belief that they were shamanistic or otherwise heterodox; and the belief, anyway, that Sufism was naturally inclined to heterodoxy is groundless: for every group with strange practices or beliefs we can find a group of fundamentalist orthodoxy.

This unhistorical attitude to Islam in fourteenth- fifteenth-century Central Asia is complemented by blatant misinterpretations of the subject-matter of the paintings. Specifically, a scroll fragment on silk (H. 2153, fol. 40b) (Fig. 5) with a group of demons rending a horse, which has been argued to represent a shamanistic scene of horse sacrifice, cannot be anything of the kind. Why the shamans should be shown as demons is not explained, and though horse sacrifice indeed played a part in the burial rites of the ancient Turks and the Mongols,[11] the wretched beast was not rent limb from limb, but stuffed and placed at or over the grave. Horses were also used by Mongols and earlier Turks as meat, though in the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of law) it is actually *haram* (forbidden). The Oirat tribe,[12] who arrived in Mamluk Cairo in the late thirteenth century and settled outside the northern gates of the city, scandalized the local population by eating horseflesh. Tamerlane's revolting feasts at Samarkand and Shahr-i Sabz, with great porcelain bowls of horseflesh and entrails, were not, however, repeated by his more orthodox descendants Shahrukh, Ulugh Beg, and certainly Babur, as far as I can tell from their historians.[13] The beastly demon scene need not therefore depict anything more than demons' beastly habits.

One of the most curious aspects of the Siyah Qalam paintings is that they seem to have tempted normally rigorous scholars to suspend their critical faculties, take the line of least resistance and make up a story, whether plausible or not. While they are mostly





7. "Camp Scene" (detail). Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Line and wash on brownish, unsized paper. 19.8x37.1 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 8b.

8. "Exotic animals." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Scroll fragments, brush drawing, ink and wash on paper. 32x49 cm Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 95b.

easy to refute, it is more difficult to make positive suggestions, for it is necessary not only to identify the figures and the scenes in which they appear but also to suggest where the painters of the "Muhammad Siyah Qalam" group worked. The paintings are divided, by genus and by occupation, into three largely parallel groups: demons, blacks and wanderers; grooms, carpenters or builders; and what could be called entertainments—ghoulish picnics, teasing animals, dancing, firework scenes. The division is not systematic, nor, indeed, is any group the work of a single hand; and the reasons for the parallelism and its extent remain obscure. The blacks are particularly remarkable since, although dark-skinned figures occur widely in Islamic painting, they are almost invariably Indian. Their appearance clearly conforms to the disparaging descriptions of blacks by the classical Muslim writers,[14] and the activities reflect the generally patronizing Muslim view that their love of music and dancing was simple-minded. The wanderers (Fig. 6) have often been said to be nomads, but recently there has been a greater degree of agreement that this is a most inaccurate term. They have virtually no animals, either for baggage or for grazing; there is not a yurt or an encampment in sight; and many of them appear to be unshod, which is all the more inappropriate since the heavy garments they wear (which may be felt, though they do not drape as if they were) suggest that they are wandering in winter. Equally the unredeemed ugliness of young and old alike is a bitter contrast to the traditions of the nomadic Turco-Mongol tribes, who through the *ghulams* (young, male slaves) they furnished to so many Muslim dynasties created an ideal of male beauty which became a topos in Persian literature.

The extreme naturalism of the wanderer group (which may or may not argue for realism) has made it tempting to conclude that they are after sketches from life and that they are in a sense journalism, even though that is a negligible factor in Islamic painting. If they are after a journalistic source, this demands a context. Among the events with which they have been associated are: a) Tamerlane's deportations of craftsmen from the cities he captured, sacked or destroyed to work on his buildings at Shahr-i-Sabz and Samarkand (*c.* 1385-1405); b) the Timurid embassy to Ming China in 1419-22 described by its secretary Ghiyath al-Din Naqqash; and, less plausibly, c) delegations of Qipchaq Turks to the court of Mehmed the Conquerer in later fifteenth-century Istanbul. Both a) and b) raise insuperable objections. The wanderers are clearly not working, as Clavijo described them, under constraint; there are no buildings or even building sites; there seems no reason to revise the conclusion brilliantly presented by Ivanov and Akimushkin that there was no painting at Tamerlane's court at Samarkand; and the historians' accounts of his deportations, for which the physical evidence is surprisingly weak, may well be commonplace panegyric of a World-Conqueror.[15] In the case of the embassy to China, Ghiyath al-Din's[16] narrative is not obviously that of a painter. The sites he describes in detail are principally great Buddhist temples and their idols—which he, incidentally, often fails to recognize as such. The "Siyah Qalam" wanderers are obviously not illustrations to that particular narrative. But why should the painters refer merely to events which happen to have come down to us? In fact, recourse to the journalism theory is naive and a bit presumptuous. It also does little for the chronology.

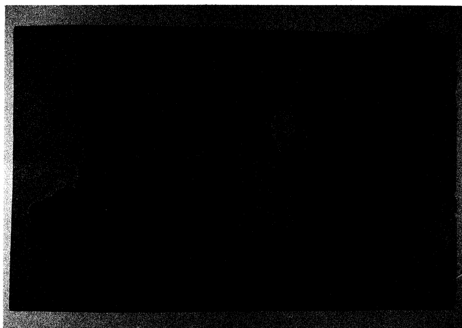
One obvious conclusion of the rough parallelism of the three groups of demons, blacks and wanderers is that they could be seen as studies (though rather more than sketches) of figures in particular positions—with sticks, with tools, bearing heavy weights, dancing, conversing, and so on, which, like many studies, may never have

been used. Certainly, some pages are not compositions at all but congeries of vignettes (like the elegant study of a camel and two grooms, H. 2153, fol. 104b, signed "*mashq-i* Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam" and an unsigned associated study, H. 2153, fol. 82b). Such also is a camp scene (Fig. 7) where the images of servants preparing food or blowing a fire, knock-kneed horses grazing, dogs playing, arms stacked and a traveller with his baggage in conversation with a poorly-dressed "native" are actually all discrete units. These vignettes may be compared with studies of a water-buffalo in the Bahram Mirza album or even with scroll fragments of exotic animals (Fig. 8). Though in comparison with these, the style of the wanderer paintings is coarse and almost deliberately crude, an impression probably exaggerated by the brownish unpolished paper, they are by no means far in spirit or aesthetic feeling from such studies.

Many of the sheets have been cut up, remains of limbs are to be seen at the edge, and they may originally therefore have been larger compositions or groups, the significance of which is now difficult to reconstruct. The difficulty of interpretation, moreover, may partly stem from the fact that the draughtsmen themselves did not fully understand what the people they drew were doing. Two sheets (Fig. 9), one a later copy, have black figures pulling out their tongues. Could they possibly have been a doctor's patients? If we cannot tell, then neither, probably, could the draughtsman. Possible misinterpretation adds yet another complication—the distinction between what could have been direct observation and the decorative details added by a court painter when the sketch was worked up.

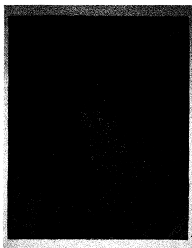
Some of the sheets also bear sketches which show that they have been re-used. A sheet with dancing demons (H. 2153, fol. 64a) overlies a sketch in red of a twelve-pointed star and the beginnings of a star-polygon system; a painting of a demon bearing away a horse (H. 2153, fol. 38a) overlies sketched arabesques in black. The demon paintings on silk show no such underlying detail. For the wanderers, as with some of the demon paintings on paper, there are clear traces of outlines in black underlying the gouache. If these also were copied from paintings on silk, the originals do not survive, but it follows that, for all their vividness and apparent immediacy, some or all of them are worked-up studio products.[17] Moreover, quite apart from recurring details like the round brown eyes of the wanderers and their animals, which could well be stylistic idiosyncrasies, certain elements are plainly mechanical repeats, like the copulating dogs first noted by Zeren Tanındı.[18] Recurrences, moreover, are not restricted to details. Thus a camel-rider shown from the back in extreme *contrapposto* (Fig. 10) is evidently identical with the prone figure crushed by a rock (Fig. 11). The treatment of the fur of the reddish camel in the former also strongly suggests the half-naked, red-bearded, blue-eyed "Atlas" figure (Fig. 12), who is in some respects markedly similar to a red-bearded slave (Fig. 13). This suggests that on sheets now lost other figures may have been repeated.

Even where the figures are not identical, however, many of them are from the same ethnic group or similarly clothed. For example, two half-naked figures (Fig. 13), one red and one black, wear skirts and stoles with almost identical gold jewellery, anklets, wristlets, ear-rings and hold staves with bells, the red-skinned man with a bell round his neck and the black with a nose-ring. These ornaments are not personal finery but the attributes of slaves; demons (H. 2153, ff. 48a, 27b) are similarly shown. The half-naked figures recur on other sheets, though without jewellery. Some of the red-skinned men are clean shaven (Fig. 14), but they share similar physical characteristics —enormous hands and feet, pronounced jowls and blunt, snub noses and sometimes

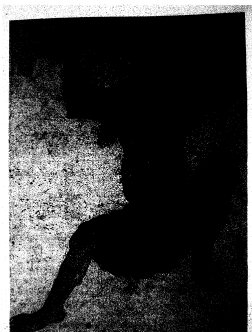


9. "A black pulling out his tongue and a bearded man on a *kursi* [chair]." Later 15th century, Akkoyunlu Tabriz. Gouache and gold on brownish paper. 13.1 x 19.7 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2160, fol. 89a. A worked-up copy of a larger format line and wash drawing on brownish unsized paper, H. 2153, fol. 90a.

even blue eyes. These are all features peculiar to northerners—Russians, not Asiatics or Turks. The clothed wanderers are also very largely of the same physical type. Notably, their heavy beards and enormous hands and feet are entirely uncharacteristic of the nomads of the Asiatic steppes. Their bell-shaped headdresses, which are plainly not even apologies for Muslim turbans, are diversely trimmed and many have gilt details (both the diversity and the gold details could well be ascribed to the painter's imagination), and the men's garments are not Asiatic either.[19] They are in fact all of a kind, an outer robe with lapels in contrasting colours with wide revers and a broad collar behind (Fig. 15) which can be raised to be high-standing (Fig. 10). They are waisted but are only exceptionally belted (H. 2153, fol. 65a). Boots, when present, may have turned-up toes and appear to be nailed (Fig. 10); they may bear appliqué decoration, evidently felt cloud-bands. Even making allowance for what painters and copyists have added of their own, one might think the merchant in the encampment vignettes (Fig. 7) looks most like a Russian boyar. That is, certainly, to beg the







10. "A camel rider, evidently in conversation with another," with a scrawled attribution, "*Kar-i* [work of] Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Cut-down sheet, brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper. 19x15.6 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 54a.

11. "A figure crushed by a rock," (possibly an illustration to the Gayumarth narrative in the *Shahname*). Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, ink and gouache with gold on brownish, unsized paper. 16.9x27.3 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 105a.

12. "A half-naked, red-bearded figure holding up a beam or capital." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper with details in gold. 25.7x19.8 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 128a. The figure may suggest an Atlas, or possibly a Samson (cf. Fig. 13).



13. "A red-skinned and a black-skinned slave in conversation." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper with gold details. 18.4x26.5 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 128a. Could this possibly also be connected with a Samson narrative? The blue-eyed figure would then be blind: "Eyeless in Gaza, at the mill with slaves" (*Samson Agonistes*).

question, since the origins of boyar costume as we know it are not well studied, must in part be Asiatic, and may well owe much to deliberate borrowings from the relics of the Golden Horde in the reign of Ivan the Terrible (d. 1584). But the parallel remains close.

These observations are a slightly amplified version of remarks made in a review of M. S. Ipşiroğlu's facsimile publication of a group of the Siyah Qalam drawings.[20] There is no space to deal with all the alternative identifications, but by elimination the Russian hypothesis remains the most plausible. However, who could they have been? And why should they have come to the notice of a Muslim painter? There are two obvious explanations, though each runs into problems because of the large gaps in our knowledge: they were pilgrims to Jerusalem, or fur traders. Although in the fourteenth century the pilgrimage route from Muscovy to Constantinople was down via the Don or to Azov (Tana) and Kaffa overland across Eastern Europe to Constantinople, the former route passed through the territories of the Golden Horde, at the point, west of Saray, where the Don and Volga are closest.[21] The decline and fall of the Golden Horde at the end of the fourteenth century removed a serious obstacle to Russian communication with the south, and in the fifteenth century Astrakhan was a principal market for both Russian and Tatar merchants, with a flourishing slave trade. With Ottoman expansion in Eastern Europe, moreover, the eastern routes became more attractive and there is evidence that Muscovite relations became somewhat closer with the Akkoyunlu at Tabriz, particularly under Uzun Hasan who married the daughter of the last Byzantine emperor of Trebizond and Ya'qub Beg, who for the Venetians and the Genoese were valuable potential allies against the Ottomans. Contarini[22] met at Tabriz in 1475 a Muscovite ambassador, Marco Rosso (perhaps an Italianized Russian name, not an Italian) and returned in his company via Astrakhan to Moscow.



14. "A red-skinned and a black-skinned slave." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper. 16.2x27 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 37b.

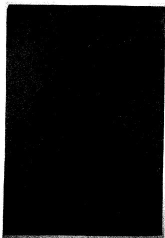
The mechanics of the fur trade in the Near East are also obscure, despite the abundant evidence of a colossal demand for fine furs in fifteenth-century Iran, Turkey and Egypt. For the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it has been argued that the structure and routes of the Muscovite[23] fur trade with the south were radically affected by over-trapping in western Russia which pushed the trappers towards the Urals, while simultaneously Ottoman expansion pushed the routes eastwards towards the Volga and across the Caspian to Tabriz. There would, therefore, have been no dearth of Russians at Tabriz, and if the wanderers are Russians, a Tabrizi painter would not have had to travel far to find them.

Leaving aside obvious differences in technique and media (which, nevertheless, could at some stage decide which of the group are primary, secondary or tertiary), we may say that some of them are almost certainly illustrations, though not necessarily to a book. On the one hand we have clear themes from the labours of Rustam, in the *Shahname* of Firdawsi, in combat with a black div (H. 2153, fol. 64b), or about to be thrown into the Caspian by the div Akvan (Fig. 16); and a prone figure with his head crushed by a boulder (Fig. 11) may similarly relate to the life of King Gayumarth. None of these is a sketch, and their wildness, ferocity and theatricality may even suggest that they were meant to illustrate recitals of the *Shahname*.[24] Such themes link the wanderer paintings to a central classic of Iranian culture, hence, probably, to western Iran rather than Central Asia. There is further evidence of Western influence in two figures with dishevelled locks (Fig. 17) which may easily be paralleled in Byzantine

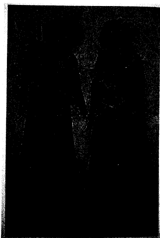
and Russian icon-painting of ascetics under Venetian influence. Moreover, Julian Raby[25] has recently shown that another painting (Fig. 18) contains a figure with flying draperies clearly after a Western representation of Samson killing the lion.[26] The subject was a favourite in fifteenth-century Northern Europe, though Raby observes that in neither of the two variant drawings of Samson riding a lion, which reached Istanbul *c.* 1450 in the Jacopo Bellini sketchbook now in the Louvre,[27] is he wearing a cloak. His conclusion that figure 18 is not necessarily one of the original "Siyah Qalam" group but could have been the work of an artist in Istanbul, simultaneously imitating Siyah Qalam and modifying a European theme, faces, however, two quite serious objections. First, none of the other paintings of the group had any pronounced influence on painting at the court of Mehmed II or his successors; and secondly, stylistically it appears to be very much of a piece with the rest of the wanderer group.

Although this discussion of the wanderer paintings is inevitably sketchy, the conclusion it suggests, by elimination and by reference to what evidence there is, is that they were executed at Tabriz. The purpose for which they were originally executed is obscure, but some of them could have been adapted to the purposes of narrative illustration, while later more colouristic and less linear versions could well have been album leaves. The close relations of Akkoyunlu Tabriz with the Mediterranean would also explain why elements from Byzantine painting and northern German depictions of Samson could have come to the notice of the studio. The virtual absence of influence on Ottoman painting is sufficent to rule out Istanbul, the only plausible alternative with such strong European connections. Though I have confined my remarks to the wanderer group, the other groups, the blacks and the demons, could, with somewhat different arguments, be

15. "Two old men with a horse drinking from a stream," with a scrawled attribution, "*Kar-i* [work of] Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper. 16.7x26 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 113a.



16. "The div Akvan about to cast the sleeping Rustam into the Caspian." 15th century, Iran. Brush drawing, line and wash with gold details on brownish, unsized paper. 26.5x18.9 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 129a.



17. "Two ascetics in conversation," with a scrawled attribution, "*Kar-i* [work of] Muhammad Siyah Qalam." Later 15th century, probably Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and wash with gold details on brownish, unsized paper. 27.9x18.9 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 106b.



18. "A Samson figure," (after a north German prototype of *c.* 1470, detail from a sheet of vignettes). 1470s, Tabriz. Brush drawing, line and gouache on brownish, unsized paper. 15.8x28.5 cm. (sheet). Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2153, fol. 29b. The sheet of paper is of various pieces glued together, both above and at the left hand side, and may indicate that it is a scroll fragment too.

similarly associated with Tabriz. In the circumstances, however, given the striking use of *contrapposto* and other Italianate devices, it may also appear fruitful to consider the possibility that some of these subjects were done by painters acquainted with contemporary Italian drawings or prints. If part of the problem of these "Siyah Qalam" paintings is that they are culturally and technically hybrid, part of the explanation could be that one of their constituents is European.

The "Siyah Qalam" paintings evidently represent an abortive episode in the history of fifteenth-century Persian painting: the little influence they had on the court painting of the Akkoyunlu Turcomans at Tabriz was abruptly curtailed by their capture by the Ottomans. It is, however, curious that they did not have wider influence in Iran and that the whole lot, on silk or paper, scroll fragments and sketches, should have been so systematically collected into four albums (H. 2153, H. 2152, H. 2160 and H. 2154). Their often poor state suggests that they may have suffered further on their way to Istanbul but one might guess that they had been already damaged and were the residue of some larger collection destroyed by fire or flood, the treasured heirlooms of the Akkoyunlu. Damage from the elements would explain, *inter alia*, why so many have been cut down, or cut up. Notwithstanding, the demon group almost certainly inspired the animated divs and jinns in pages attributed to Sultan Muhammad in the Shah Tahmasp *Shahname*. The few paintings of the group in foreign collections were almost certainly removed from the Istanbul albums in the nineteenth century, but a particularly hideous painting of a chained demon led by two blacks (Cleveland Museum of Art, J. H. Wade Fund, 82-63) seems to be the product of another atelier. Moreover, in early Mughal painting, evidently for albums for Akbar, certain themes or individuals suggest that the painters of his studio were somehow familiar with the material in H. 2153. This material, which is widely dispersed, needs to be collected and evaluated, but it may be that the libraries of the subcontinent, which are still very poorly known, will once again reveal material to illuminate the dark history of painting in fifteenth-century Iran outside the major courts or show that the major manuscripts produced in their scriptoria were not, as they really never could have been, the whole story.

NOTES

1. Notably, his contributions to Basil Gray, ed., *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th-16th centuries* (Paris/London, 1979).
2. With L. Binyon and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1933; New York, 1971).
3. "Some problems of two Istanbul albums, H. 2153 and H. 2160" in E. J. Grube and Eleanor Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran. Paintings from four Istanbul Albums* (London, 1985), pp. 37-41. A. A. Ivanov also suggests (ibid., pp. 66-68) that a drawing of *qilins* (mythical quadrupeds) (H. 2153, fol. 170b, 2) bearing an inscription, "*amal-i* [work of] Ustad Muhammad Siyah Qalam," may also be a signature; though it is not obviously in the same hand, it is at least carefully aligned to the drawing and, from its resemblance to the signature of Shaykhi al-Ya'qubi, one of the most able painters at the court of the Akkoyunlu ruler Ya'qub Beg at Tabriz (1478-90), could be given provisionally a late fifteenth century date.
4. "Siyah Qalam" in Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran*, pp. 62-65. The effective difference between a signature and an attribution (whether learned or not) is, however, difficult to assess.
5. Ernst Kühnel, "Malernamen in den Berliner 'Saray-Alben," *Kunst des Orients* III (1959): 66-77. The signed drawings in H. 2153, some with details in colour, suggest that he was not merely a copyist of other painters' work.
6. Horst Blank, "Eine persische Pinsel-Zeichnung nach der Tazza Farnese," *Archäologischer Anzeiger* (1964), pp. 307-12. Though it has, quite improperly, been used to cast doubt on the authenticity of the drawings in the Diez albums, among many wholly convincing details the hair of the standing youth (Triptolemus) is treated very similarly to the angels' hair in the *Divan* of Ahmad Jala'ir (Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 32.35) which is datable *c.* 1410. It is not entirely accurate: Triptolemus has his right forearm truncated and his right leg is missing, but just as Muhammad b. Mahmudshah's drawings after copies of Yuan prototypes have a certain Chinese flavour about them, the absence of modelling here gives the drawing a neo-classical look, curiously reminiscent of Flaxman. The Tazza Farnese first became known in 1471 when it was acquired by Lorenzo de' Medici from Pope Sixtus IV, who had it from Paul II (1464-71). Its earlier history in the fifteenth century is unknown but the present drawing is evidence that it came from the East. The Timurids' well-documented taste for fine hard-stones makes it probable that it was at one time in Herat,

and possibly later in Tabriz. It is difficult to pronounce definitely where the drawing was done but it must be pre-Akkoyunlu in date.
7. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Corpus der italienischen Zeichnungen 1300-1450* I-IV (Berlin, 1968).
8. Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran.*
9. For a recent specimen of such reasoning cf. Emel Esin, "Muhammad Siyah Qalam and the Inner Asian Turkish tradition" in Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran*, pp. 90-105. Under the early Timurids, principally at Herat, there certainly worked a group of chancery scribes, *bakhshi*, who wrote in the Uyghur script. But these, to judge from their names and their concurrent mastery of Arabic, were Muslims not Buddhists, and the language they transcribed was Chaghatay Turkish or Turki, not Uyghur at all. Given the unsuitability of the Uyghur script for transcribing Arabic and Turkish it must have been an artificial revival, to reinforce the Timurids' claims to have inherited an ancestral Turco-Mongolian past, in which, however, Buddhism may well have played no role whatsoever.
10. Summarized in Beyhan Karamağarali, "The Siyah Qalam paintings and their relation to esoteric Muslim Sects" in Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran*, pp. 106-109. It could, of course, be argued further that "Muhammad Siyah Qalam" was a shaman too, but the implications of that do not seem to have been followed up.
11. "V. V. Bartol'd's 'The burial rites of the Turks and the Mongols' translated with an iconographic appendix by J. M. Rogers" in J. A. Boyle and K. Jahn, eds., *In Memoriam Zeki Velidi Togan* (= *Central Asiatic Journal*) XIV (Wiesbaden, 1970).
12. David Ayalon, "The Wafidiya in the Mamluk kingdom," *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad, 1951), pp. 81-104.
13. Ruy Gonzales de Clavijo, *The Spanish embassy to Samarkand 1403-1406* (London, 1971), pp. 253-54.
14. Bernard Lewis, "Arabs and Negroes, An historical essay," *Encounter* (August 1970), pp. 18-36.
15. C. P. Haase, "Probleme der Künstlerkonzentration unter Timur in Zentralasien" in Albert J. Gail, ed., *Künstler und Werkstatt in den orientalischen Gesellschaften* (Graz, 1981), pp. 61-73.
16. Synoptic translation and commentary in W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 279-97. Though Ghiyath al-Din is stated by 'Abd al-Razzaq Samarqandi to have been an artist of rare talent, none of his works has been identified. The report of the China embassy he presented on his return is, he states, a literary production, and the sources do not even imply that it was intended to be illustrated.
17. H. 2153, fol. 70a is basically a sketch with only a few details painted in, but it must belong to a secondary group, more polished in style and brighter in colour scheme, much closer to Akkoyunlu court painting at Tabriz e.g. H. 2160, fol. 52a, two men with a Catherine wheel; H. 2160, fol. 89a, a man on a *kursi* and a black pulling out his tongue; H. 2160, fol. 69b, bell-ringers. It may or may not be significant that most of this group are in H. 2160 and not H. 2153.
18. Cf. note 3 (H. 2153, ff. 101a, 76a—the dogs recur gambolling in a cloud-collar drawing in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 14. 542 and in the "encampment" scene, H. 2153, fol. 86. Can they be some sort of trade-mark?).
19. Cf. John E. Vollmer, "Technical and ethnic considerations of costume depictions in the Istanbul albums H. 2153 and H. 2160" in Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran*, pp. 136-44, who, on the basis of study of Asiatic costume, observes that the costumes show a number of made-up details and that none of them is observed from nature. This is a timely reminder of the danger of treating the wanderer group as journalism.
20. J. M. Rogers in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (1978/1), pp. 171-73. In the intervening period I have come to revise my suggested dating of *c.* 1400, which now seems to be far too early, in favour of a later fifteenth-century date. Though it diminishes the possibility that the albums were booty from the Ottoman victory at Başkent in 1473, the earlier title of H. 2153 as "the Ya'qub Beg album" seems more or less accurate.
21. George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries* (Washington, DC, 1984), journey of Ignatius of Smolensk (1389), *passim.*
22. Stanley of Alderley, ed., *Travels to Tana by Josafá Barbaro and Ambrogio Contarini* (London, 1873), *passim.* The Bursa and Ankara *sicills* (judicial archives) contain numerous documents from the mid-fifteenth century onwards relating to Russian merchants engaged in the silk trade with Gilan and Mazandaran, and clearly, if such *sicills* existed for Tabriz, we should find them similarly represented.
23. The evidence is too scattered to rehearse here but, such as it is, is presented in my "Ottoman luxury trades and their regulation" in Hans-Georg Majer, ed., *Osmanistische Studien zur Wirtschafts—und Sozialgeschichte. In Memoriam Vančo Boškov* (Wiesbaden, 1986), pp. 135-55. Inside Muscovy it is highly probable that the centralized marketing documented under Ivan the Terrible in the later sixteenth century did not reflect earlier practice.
24. Cf. Nurhan Atasoy, "Four Istanbul albums and some fragments from fourteenth century Shahnamehs," *Ars Orientalis* VIII (1970): 19-48; "Illustrations displayed during Shahname recitations," *Memorial volume of the V International Congress of Iranian Art and Archaeology* II (Tehran, 1972): 262-72.
25. "Samson and Siyah Qalam" in Grube and Sims, eds., *Between China and Iran*, pp. 160-63.
26. Cf. two other related drawings of increasingly linear character (H. 2153, fol. 137b, evidently copied from it; and a westernized figure holding a snake and with a snake girdle riding a lion, H. 2152, fol. 51a).
27. Bernhard Degenhart and Annegrit Schmitt, *Jacopo Bellini, the Louvre Album of Drawings* (New York, 1984), Plate 103 (fol. 81a) showing Samson nude standing with the jawbone of the ass and the lion slain; and Plate 105 (fol. 83a) showing Samson riding the lion and breaking its jaws apart.

Changing Worlds: Bihzad and the New Painting

Thomas W. Lentz

Of all the luminaries associated with the short-lived, rarefied art known as Persian painting, none has seemed to shine brighter in posterity than the celebrated Timurid painter Ustad Kamaluddin Bihzad. Neither in known historical sources nor in the eyes of modern scholarship has any artist commanded comparable respect as an innovator or creative force (Fig. 1). Born in the mid-fifteenth century and dead by the 1530s, Bihzad was active during a half-century critical in the cultural history of the eastern Islamic world. He witnessed at close hand not only the fall of his own illustrious patrons, the Timurids, in 1506, but also the dynamic rise in their place of new, aesthetically knowledgeable imperial powers who would capitalize on the Timurid achievement.

It is against this shifting historical and political background that Bihzad's accomplishments — both real and mythical — must in part be measured, for this was a period when cultural prowess and patronage began to assume larger, more complex roles among ruling élites. The Timurids' early and expedient realization that patronage of Persian art and culture could be perceived in terms of political prestige helped transform the dynasty from a semi-nomadic Turkic military aristocracy into an envied model of urban refinement and sophistication. Their resounding success as patrons was not lost on those powerful, often untutored aspirants to power who sought both status and legitimacy in the volatile Turko-Iranian world of the early sixteenth century: the Uzbeks in Transoxiana (1500-98), the Ottomans in Turkey (1281-1924), the Safavids in Iran (1501-1732) and the Timurids' own descendants in India, the Mughals (1526-1858). Each of these militant states exploited to varying degrees the Timurid cultural legacy by manipulating some aspect of the dynasty's achievements or ideals, either through imitation, appropriation, or extrapolation. This process, which implicitly empowered the Timurids with an unassailable aura of cultural authority, only helped further to entrench the dynasty as a royal model for those in the process of assuming or enhancing power.

The Myth of Bihzad

Bihzad's own artistic legacy became an important, much coveted device in the new imperial cultural strategies of the sixteenth century, as did the artist himself. Precious little is known of his life,[1] however, and what remains for the most part are extravagant encomia of his talents and prestige from Safavid and Mughal sources, the two dynasties

that most skilfully exploited his charisma for their own self-aggrandizing purposes. As a court painter at Herat intimately linked with the fabled lives of cultural giants like the poet Mir Ali Shir Nawa'i and Sultan Husayn Mirza, the last Timurid ruler, Bihzad came to be viewed as larger than life. He and his work were perceived as embodiments of Timurid cultural brilliance, "trophies" that represented an eagerly desired status for newly emerging patrons. This is most effectively illustrated by the Safavids' actual, physical appropriation of the artist. The importance of Shah Isma'il appointing Bihzad head of the Safavid *kitabkhana* (royal library or workshop) in 1522 at Tabriz is symbolized by the extravagant terms of his investiture decree,[2] which not only acknowledges his artistic authority but is also an early reflection of the artist's apotheosis under the Safavids. The Timurids' descendants in India, the Mughals, were even more assiduous in their use of their ancestors' cultural renown; Timurid titles, court ritual, and works of art were retained or reintroduced to buttress Mughal cultural pretensions, a point illustrated by their voracious, systematic collection of Timurid manuscripts.[3] Observations on artistic matters by the Mughal emperors themselves, together with the frequent appearance of spurious Bihzad "signatures" during their rule, further affirm the artist's almost talismanic significance in the formation of the dynasty's aesthetic profile.[4]

In this context Bihzad's actual contribution is problematic, obscured by the propagandizing tendencies of the literary sources and further compounded by controversies over the identification of his own work (Figs. 2, 3).[5] It seems unlikely that his *oeuvre* will ever be satisfactorily agreed upon by specialists, with the notable exception of one manuscript, a *Bustan* of Sa'di executed for Sultan Husayn Mirza in 1488 (Figs. 1, 4, 9), whose brilliant paintings are unanimously viewed as authentic works by Bihzad.[6] They clearly illustrate those elements that for art historians have always distinguished Bihzad and those who painted in his manner from earlier practitioners of Persian painting: originality of composition, individualization of the human figure, a heightened sense of naturalism, an interest in more realistic figural interaction and motion, and an emphasis on the depiction of everyday activities.

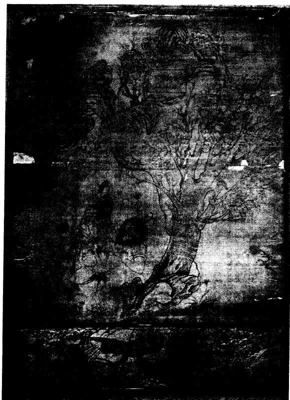
Given the problem of accurately distinguishing between the work of Bihzad and that of his contemporaries, Bihzad may best be considered simply one exponent among many — although perhaps the most brilliant — of what can be called the new painting. At the very least it is somewhat implausible to credit a single artist with every innovation of the late fifteenth century, a time when a number of perceptible changes in a highly conservative and codified art-form can indeed be charted. Yet his name stubbornly remains synonymous with these changes, the product of relentless propagandizing by later writers. More accurately Bihzad should be seen as a reformer, not a revolutionary.[7] The new painting linked to his name that emerged at Herat in the late fifteenth century stood securely within the traditional bounds of Persian manuscript illustration (Fig. 5); its internal codes and conventions, governed by the requirements of the narrative and the format of the book, were rigorously maintained. This mode, even as practised by Bihzad, was never really discarded but was instead continually modified and expanded to allow the existence of new pictorial devices.

The Illustrated Book in Timurid Iran

How did the new elements found in the paintings of Bihzad and his contemporaries actually function within this restricted visual mode? What was the nature of their impact



1. "King Dara and the herdsman," Bihzad (*Bustan* of Sa'di, Adab Farsi 908). Dated A.H. Rajab 893 (June 1488), Timurid, Herat, Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 30.5 x 21.5 cm. General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, fol. 10a. Photo: Peter Brenner.





2. "Rustam kills the white div," Bihzad(?). First quarter of the 16th century, Iran. Ink on paper. 31.4 x 27.1 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2154, fol. 112a.

3. "A lion," Bihzad(?). First quarter of the 16th century, Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 13 x 24.4 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2154, fol. 83b.

4. "The seduction of Yusuf," Bihzad (*Bustan* of Sa'di, Adab Farsi 908). Dated A.H. Rajab 893 (June 1488), Timurid, Herat, Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 30.5 x 21.5 cm. General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, fol. 52b. Photo: Peter Brenner.






5. "Timur granting an audience in Balkh on the occasion of his accession to power in April, 1370," Bihzad (?) (*Zafarnama* of Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi). Dated A.H. 872 (1467-68); paintings executed *c.* 1490, Timurid, Herat(?), Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 23.5 x 15.2 cm. Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, John Work Garrett Collection, ff. 82b-83a. Photo: Jeffery Crespi.

on both artist and viewer? Were they perceived as radical changes within this convention-bound form or spontaneous, cumulative developments? One can at least begin to suggest answers to some of these questions by comparing, on the most fundamental levels, the functional aspects of formal structure in earlier Timurid painting with those found in the work of Bihzad. Within this context it is critically important to recognize the potency and even the magic of painted pictures in this uniquely private art which has no true counterpart in other aesthetic traditions. Within the wider societal and theological constraints of Islamic culture, representational images as found in royal Timurid books, flawlessly executed in an array of breathtaking pigments, exercised a profound influence on their élite audience. Today Western audiences, with their

sophisticated, image-rich visual experience cumulatively derived from television, films and advertising, are likely to find the special qualities of Timurid painting difficult or too subtle to comprehend. As is generally true for Persian manuscript illustration, the formal values and attitudes dominant during any one period were encoded as formal conventions. These conventions functioned as political, cultural and social encapsulations of a perceived reality for the audience, in this case the Timurid élite. By isolating and contrasting the formal values dominant in early and late phases of Timurid painting, one can explore not only how Bihzadian painting may have operated within its restrictive parameters but also what it represented for the short history and development of Persian painting.

An orchestrated programme of artistic patronage of the ruling house was one strategy by which the invading Timurids obviated their differences of language, culture and ideology with the Islamic Iranian urban tradition that largely framed their world after Timur's death in 1405. The illustrated book conceived for royal patrons played a key role in this process, as under the Timurids it was elevated by means of lavish expense, labour and imagination to the rank of a precious object, one capable of assuming rich layers of meaning. Under the direction of the *kitabkhana*, a unified, consistent and decidedly contrived vision was disseminated in the royal house during the first half of the fifteenth century. A typical illustration of a court scene from a mid-1440s royal copy of a *Khamsa* of Nizami underlines the frozen, formal equilibrium achieved by the Timurid workshops and desired by the princes of the royal house (Fig. 6). Here is found the artificial "reality" so typical of early Timurid painting at Herat: a flat, two-dimensional conception of space, idealized figures, brilliant, often unrealistic colours, and a highly ordered, balanced composition whose main feature seems to be not movement but stasis. These highly controlled images, mostly reliant on convention and formalism for visual impact within their limited, enclosed spaces, make no real attempts at an illusionistic representation of the physical world. The central fact of this painting is its clear, perceptible allegiance to the idea of an artificial, staged environment that is theatrical in its presentation, an effect which immediately transfers the forms and intentions of the painting to metaphorical levels.

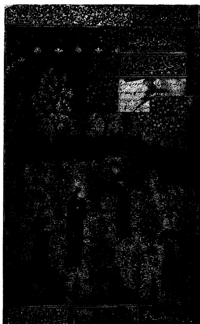
As has often been cited, this highly stereotyped language of early Timurid painting frequently functioned as a celebratory affirmation of the ruling élite and their world (Fig. 7).[8] Reliant upon the simple philosophical notion that what is seen depends on what is being looked for, the symbolic tableaux of royal pomp and pageantry that dominated early court painting at Herat communicated an idealized experience, one the Timurids envisioned for themselves. The key to this process was a response to conventionalized subjects — courtly figures, princes slaying beasts, garden enthronements — that set off in the viewer's experience or perception an order of meaning. Rather than imitation of the surface aspects of material reality — modelling, perspective, illusionistic colour — a perfect, designed reality was pursued by Timurid artists. In this context, early Timurid painting in manuscripts embraced an artificial vocabulary, one that its selective, élite audience was predisposed to see as both valid and meaningful.

The New Painting

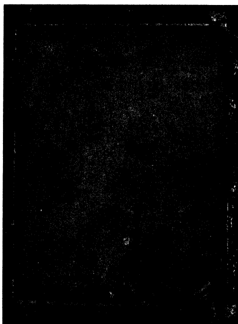
Given these parameters, painting in books as conceived by the Timurids assumed the properties of a highly sophisticated, autonomous language. In its imaginative use of



6. "Khusraw receives Farhad," (*Khamsa* of Nizami, H. 781). Dated A.H. 849 (1445-46), Timurid, Herat, Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 24.1 x 16 cm. Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 781, fol. 62a. Photo: Peter Brenner.



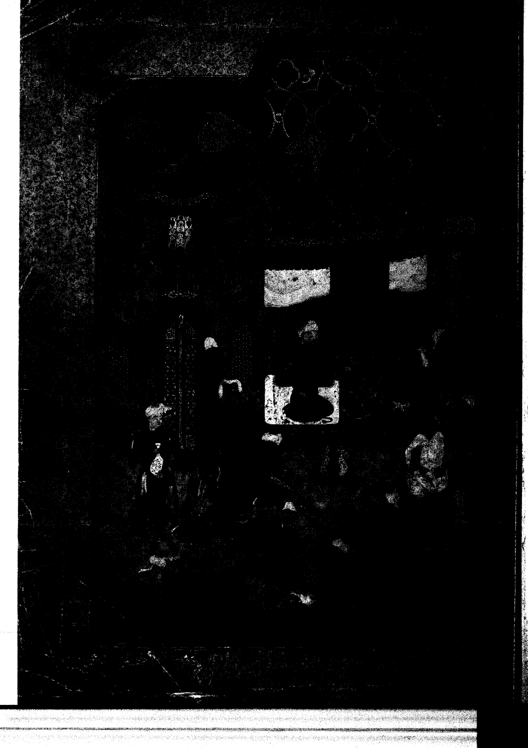
7. "Humay and Humayun in a garden" (possibly from an *Anthology*). *c.* 1430. Timurid, Herat (?), Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 29 x 17.5 cm. Collection Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris. Photo: L. Sully-Jaulmes.

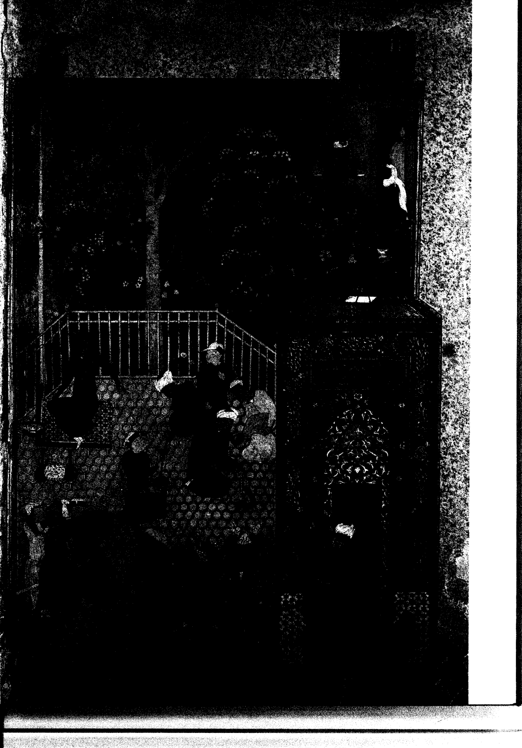


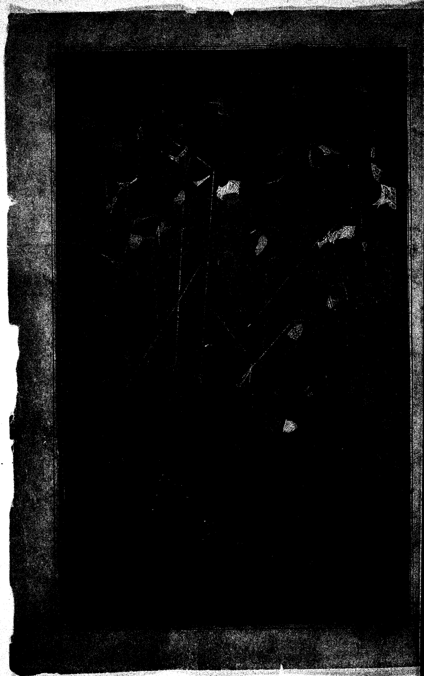
8. "Two seated men," mounted on an album page, Bihzad (?). *c.* 1480-90. Timurid, Herat (?), Iran. Ink on paper. 39.1 x 27.6 cm. Harvard University Art Museums (Arthur M. Sackler Museum), Cambridge, 1972. 299.

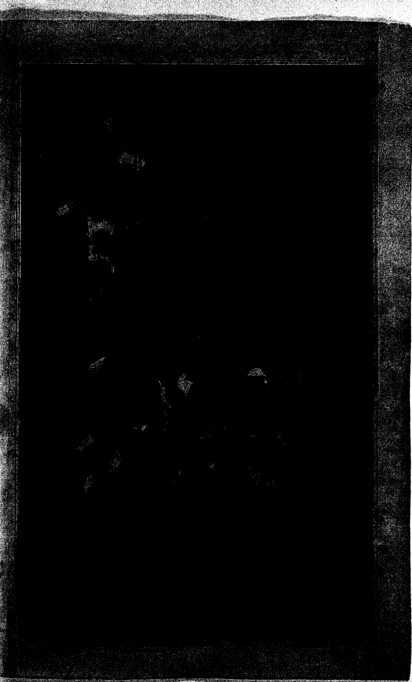
9. "A party at the court of Sultan Husayn Mirza," Bihzad (*Bustan* of Sa'di, Adab Farsi 908). Dated A. H. Rajab 893 (June 1488), Timurid, Herat, Iran. Opaque water-colour, ink and gold on paper. 30.5 x 21.5 cm. General Egyptian Book Organization, Cairo, ff. 1b-2a. Photo: Peter Brenner. ➤

convention and stereotyped imagery, Timurid painting also exhibits striking parallels to traditional Persian poetics.[9] This basic conceptual framework, while intact throughout the latter part of the fifteenth century, was also receptive to the idiomatic developments associated with Bihzad. It has been demonstrated, for example, that despite the new innovations, compositional and figural elements of early fifteenth-century painting were repeatedly maintained.[10] Yet these innovations also subtly altered the nature of manuscript illustration, and for the most part are related to the thorny issue of "realism" in Persian painting (Fig. 8). The quiet but unmistakable turn toward physical reality in Bihzad's painting would remain a matter of degree, however, as the traditional Persianate literary and artistic adherence to the notion of the ideal never fully retreated before this new shift in focus and expression.









Numerous reasons for the appearance of this new, limited realism have been suggested, ranging from the increased interest in mysticism at Sultan Husayn's court to the declining political fortunes of the dynasty that drastically altered its rule and vision of patronage.[11] But what were the actual effects on the Timurid viewer of a less abstract and more representational mode of illustration? How did these new elements affect the icon-like visual façade so carefully contrived in accordance with Timurid ideology of the early century? How did artists respond to this challenge?

Of all the new aspects of Bihzadian painting, the most telling in this regard was the implementation of specific techniques of naturalism. Evidence of it can be found in earlier Timurid painting,[12] and while its increased use in Bihzadian painting cannot be construed as an effort similar to that found in Western painting, the consistent appearance of shading, perspective and modulated colours within the ideal frame of Timurid painting signalled a profound change of dimension (Fig. 9). These elements restored for the first time since the fourteenth century a temporal context to Persian painting, and the implications of this development were wide-ranging. Earlier Timurid painting, while nominally representational, reveals a disinterest in the use of light, shade and perspective – features suggestive of physical reality – in favour of a clarity and precision of design. Physical appearances were transformed, as were emotion and expression, into a conventional scheme. Emphatically demonstrated in the painting of Bihzad is a renewed interest in the transitory, physical aspect of reality. A new sense of colour, motion and space transformed conceptual abstractions into more immediate, personal images that frankly acknowledged the existence of living counterparts behind ideal forms.

Reduction or enhancement of an image's representational qualities invariably leads to different readings of that image. Unlike earlier painting with its formal and structural affinities to poetic composition that leads one to look beyond the representational for meaning, Bihzadian painting firmly guides the eye back toward the specifics of temporal and physical reality (Fig. 10). Rather than the physical and emotional detachment of flat, idealized conventions, figures and objects are now more convincingly grounded in space. Emotions and psychological interplay are recorded that would have previously been deemed inappropriate, not to mention counterproductive, to the effect of an image. When looking at Bihzadian painting, the viewer is no longer confronted with an eternal, synthetic world but with a subtly realistic one that is temporally structured, with events unfolding as they occur in time. It is particularly significant to note that once these images are no longer articulated as timeless icons, the abstract, formalist façade of earlier painting begins to vanish (Fig. 11). Even with this admittedly slight nod to a palpable, recognizable reality, these images of Bihzad and his followers have drawn the viewer immeasurably closer to the physical world.

A twentieth-century viewer may find it difficult to ascribe these somewhat spectacular properties to mere manuscript illustration, small and restricted in audience. This view, however, would ignore not only the role that books in general played in Islamic culture but also the importance of illustrated manuscripts as ideological vehicles for Timurid patrons. More significantly, it would fail to acknowledge the special aesthetic qualities intrinsic to the "miniature." Paradoxically, the small dimensions of manuscript illustration endow it with an aesthetic and communicative ability far out of proportion to its actual size, a quality normally ascribed to far larger works such as monumental sculpture or architecture. Reduction of scale always entails the loss of certain dimensions; in the case of manuscript illustration, volume, for example, regardless of the degree of its

10. "The Timurid army attacks the survivors of the town of Nerges in Georgia," Bihzad (?) (*Zafarnama* of Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi). Dated A.H. 872 (1467-68); paintings executed *c.* 1490, Timurid, Herat (?), Iran. Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper. 23.5 x 15.2 cm. Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, John Work Garrett Collection, ff. 282b-283a. Photo: Jeffery Crespi.



"realistic" properties, is drastically altered. It has been observed, however, that this decrease in scale also triggers off a reversal in the process of perception or understanding. Quantitatively diminished, the contents of an image appear qualitatively simplified and less formidable.[13] In other words, the world it represents becomes more accessible, enhanced and suddenly within reach of the viewer.

11. "Construction of the Masjid-i Jami'in Samarkand," Bihzad (?) (*Zafarnama* of Sharafuddin Ali Yazdi). Dated A.H. 872 (1467-68); paintings executed c. 1490. Timurid, Herat(?), Iran. Opaque watercolour, ink and gold on paper. 23.5 x 15.2 cm. Johns Hopkins University Baltimore, Milton S. Eisenhower Library, John Work Garrett Collection, ff. 359b-360a. Photo: Jeffery Crespi.

An Altered Vision

The unique properties of manuscript illustration in combination with the paramount role of the book in Muslim culture provided the Timurids with a potent tool in the formation of a dynastic self-image. The idealized, princely image created in painting served the early Timurids well as they maintained the illusion of empire during the first half of the fifteenth century — giving pleasure, increasing prestige, affirming aspirations. This brash, illusory façade contrived by the ruling house rapidly crumbled during the second half of the century, a casualty of new political realities. Shrinking borders, violent internal fighting, the encroachments of rival Turkic groups in the east and west, a shrinking state treasury — these factors revealed the once-mighty dynasty as little more than a house of cards.[14]

Painting consequently reflected in part something of a retreat to another reality. As the dynasty turned inward, the imperial, iconic qualities of painting were largely refashioned by naturalistic devices that broke the idealized, eternal moment. Bihzad and his contemporaries, like their predecessors in the Timurid *kitabkhana*, fashioned another world for their patrons, but one that now acknowledged both the existence of human emotions and frailties as well as the physical reality of this world. The new popularity of mystical texts for illustration during this period introduced fresh narrative requirements and themes into the *kitabkhana*, needing a different visualization; meditations on death, mourning, and other philosophical questions, which so often drew their metaphorical images from the transitory world, were adroitly articulated with the aid of the new naturalism. The advent of common people and everyday activities as standard subjects of painting during this time can also be seen in part as a reaction by artists to the oppressive, emotional and expressive constraints of an imperial painting tradition.

Bihzad and his contemporaries responded to the shifting fortunes and tastes of their royal patrons by imaginatively modifying the visual language of the illustrated book. They provided the means by which manuscript illustration, freed of the political and dynastic shackles that dictated a uniform, iconic imagery, could directly respond to change. By avoiding atrophy and reinventing itself, Persian painting extended its creative boundaries. Here may reside the true genius of Bihzad and his contemporaries for they simultaneously maintained and advanced the unique character of Persian manuscript painting.

NOTES

1. R. Ettinghausen, "Bihzad" in *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., pp. 1211-12.
2. M. M. Qazwini and L. Bouvat, "Deux documents inédits relatif Behzad" in *Revue du monde Musulman* 26 (1914): 159-61.
3. M. Brand and G. Lowry, *Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory* (New York, 1985), pp. 87-92.
4. Ettinghausen, "Bihzad," p. 1212; see also the *Haft Paykar* manuscript in the Metropolitan Museum as described in A. Jackson and A. Yohannon, *A Catalogue of the Collection of Persian Manuscripts* (New York, 1914), pp. 71-79.
5. B. W. Robinson, "Bihzad and his School: The Materials" in *Marg*, vol. XXX, no. 2 (March 1977), pp. 51-75.
6. M. Mostafa, *Miniatures of the School of Bihzad* (Baden-Baden: Waldemar Klein, 1960).
7. B. W. Robinson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Paintings in the Bodleian Library* (Oxford, 1958), p. 64.
8. P. Soucek, "Illustrated Manuscripts of Nizami's Khamsa, 1386-1482" (Ph.D. diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1971), pp. 368-69.
9. E. Yarshater, "Some Common Characteristics of Persian Poetry and Art" in *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 61-71.
10. M. Lukens-Swietochowski, "The School of Herat from 1450 to 1506" in *The Arts of the Book in Central Asia, 14th-16th Centuries* (Boulder and Paris, 1979), pp. 179-214.
11. R. Milstein, "Sufi Elements in Late Fifteenth-Century Painting at Herat" in M. Rosen-Ayalon, ed., *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 357-69; T. Lentz and G. Lowry, *Timur and the Princely Vision: Persian Art and Culture in the Fifteenth Century* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC, 1989), pp. 239-301.
12. See, for example, the foreshortened horseman at the bottom of "Isfandiyar slays Arjasp in the brazen hold" from a *Shahnama* dated 1430 and now in Tehran: *The Survey of Persian Art* (Oxford, 1939), pl. 874.
13. C. Lévi-Strauss, "The Science of the Concrete" in C. F. Jopling, ed., *Art and Aesthetics in Primitive Societies* (New York, 1971), pp. 240-41.
14. H. R. Roemer, "The Successors of Timur" in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 6 (Cambridge, 1986): 111-25.

Sultan Muhammad Tabrizi: Painter at the Safavid Court

Priscilla Soucek

Sultan Muhammad Tabrizi or Iraqi was one of the most important painters at the Safavid court in Tabriz during the reign of Shah Tahmasp, and his paintings are both distinctively individual as well as revealing of the artistic and political climate in which he lived and worked. Two phases of his work are discernible: an early one where his ties to pre-Safavid painting in western Iran are evident, and a second phase which reflects new compositional trends at the Safavid court. The chief documents of his early career are paintings from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, now divided among a number of private and public collections,[1] and the principal evidence of his later work is a *Divan* of Hafiz in which one painting contains the name of Shah Tahmasp's brother Sam Mirza.[2] Neither group of Sultan Muhammad's paintings is precisely dated, but those from the *Shahnama* are probably earlier than 934/1527-28, whereas those from the *Divan* may have been painted between 1531 and 1533.[3]

The Early Paintings of Sultan Muhammad

All available literary evidence suggests that Sultan Muhammad was trained as a painter in Tabriz, for his earliest known paintings show a debt to the traditions of that centre.[4] The earliest documented painting by this artist, a scene of figures clad in animal skins representing the first Iranian ruler Gayumars and his court, from the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp, epitomizes the individualistic features of western Iranian painting; its consummate mastery suggests that it must be the work of a mature artist.[5] This painting is striking for the way figures are grouped in an open coil which serves to place them in space and to draw attention to Gayumars and his son, both larger in scale than the figures in front of them. More people are tucked away in the brilliantly coloured rocks which frame the central group. Despite the complexity of the rock formations, a careful modulation of colour makes the outline of individual elements perceptible. Sultan Muhammad also uses a distinctive canon of proportion in drawing human figures—a wide face, narrow shoulders, elongated torso and unusually small hands and feet—which is particularly evident in the standing figures of this composition. "The court of Gayumars" shows Sultan Muhammad's ability to use compositions that are crowded with details but in which a well

articulated structure and careful use of colour make each element discernible. The kinship of this painting with several others in this *Shahnama* such as "The feast of Sadeh," "Tahmuras defeats the divs" and "Hushang kills the black div," suggests they too were painted by Sultan Muhammad.[6]

Here discussion will focus on two of those paintings, "Tahmuras defeats the divs" and "The feast of Sadeh," both of which are now in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figs. 1, 4). These paintings share similar stylistic and compositional features. In each of them, the main figures placed in a clearing are flanked by subordinate figures and framed with a border of richly coloured rocks. The scene of "Tahmuras defeats the divs," is particularly useful for understanding the sources of Sultan Muhammad's style and its links with the earlier paintings from both Shiraz and Tabriz.

Demonic creatures have an important place in the imagination of Iran and were thought to lurk in rocky outcroppings or desert regions, ready to seize unsuspecting travellers. They also figure prominently in Iranian literature as the antagonists of heroes, such as Tahmuras. In this composition Sultan Muhammad builds upon a well-established pictorial tradition by portraying demons with a mixture of human and animal features.[7] A combat with demons, from a dispersed manuscript of the *Khavarnama,* dated to 881/1476 and probably painted in Shiraz, demonstrates Sultan Muhammad's debt to this tradition (Fig. 2).[8] The two paintings share many general features of composition such as the postures of the protagonists and the way in which the demons are characterized, but Sultan Muhammad's work has a higher level of pathos and emotional expression. His demons have an almost human range of emotions as they recoil from the hero's blows. He also rings the central scene with human spectators whose gestures and placement help to give depth to the scene.

The landscape setting of Sultan Muhammad's painting is also much richer in colour and detail than that of the *Khavarnama* painting. The scattered rock formations of the earlier work lack the visual drama of the rocky border, in shades of pink, mauve and aqua, with which Sultan Muhammad frames his scene. Another noteworthy element is the flowering tree with a pair of birds resting on its branches in the upper left corner of his painting. This vignette bears a striking resemblance to several paintings preserved in an Istanbul album, H. 2153, that were probably executed in Tabriz *c.* 1480, in which birds perch on a flowering branch (Fig. 3). Some examples combine this branch with three figures in Chinese dress.[9] It is possible that Sultan Muhammad has included the tree with birds as a "quotation" from such a painting.

The general composition of "The feast of Sadeh" has close analogies to the painting of Gayumars and his court. Here too, the chief protagonists clustered in the centre of the painting in a triangular formation and stressed by their larger scale are contrasted with numerous smaller secondary figures, and colourful rock formations define areas of the composition.

Close analogies to Sultan Muhammad's style and compositions are found in a group of paintings probably executed in Tabriz during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.[10] Sultan Muhammad's use of scale to emphasize the central figures of a painting and his habit of integrating their attendants in the landscape setting are closely paralleled in several paintings from a copy of Nizami's *Khamsa,* now in the Topkapi Museum Library, Hazine 762, including the scene of "Khusraw's lion combat."[11] In that painting, too, the ring of spectators is carefully integrated with the

1. "Tahmuras defeats the divs," Sultan Muhammad (Firdausi's *Shahnama*). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., 1970, 1970. 301.3.



landscape setting, and the composition is framed in a rim of multicoloured rocks. The central figures are drawn in a canon of proportion very similar to that later used by Sultan Muhammad. The faces of Khusraw and Shirin appear to have been completed by a Safavid painter and are very similar to those in Sultan Muhammad's paintings from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama.* Another painting from Hazine 762, depicts the meeting of Sultan Sanjar and an old woman. Here all the principal figures are very close to those in Sultan Muhammad's paintings, not only in their proportions but also in the use of large areas of blue, orange and red for their garments.[12] This colour scheme is particularly evident in his painting of "The feast of 'Id" (Figs. 8, 9). The principal difference between these illustrations and Sultan Muhammad's paintings for the *Shahnama* is in the pastel tones used for the landscape setting. More vivid hues are, however, found in some other paintings from Hazine 762. The scene of "Iskandar and the dying Dara" is set against hillocks in orange, mauve, turquoise, gold and green and also has a framing rim of multicoloured rocks (Fig. 5).

This manuscript, one of the most original produced in fifteenth-century Iran, has a discursive postscript to the text which was probably added to enhance its prestige when it was presented to Shah Isma'il in the early sixteenth century by one of his high officials, Amir Najm al-din Mas'ud Zargar Rashti.[13] A goldsmith by training, Najm al-din Mas'ud was one of Shah Isma'il's earliest and most fervent supporters and rose eventually to be his chief official or *vakil.* He was an important link between the young ruler and the cultural and administrative traditions of Iran.[14] His connection with Hazine 762 suggests that manuscript patronage at the Safavid court was not solely the prerogative of the ruler.

In addition to the binding and this postscript, several of the illustrations of the manuscript were wholly or partially painted in the Safavid period, including "Iskandar and the dying Dara" as well as some details in "Khusraw's lion combat" and "Sultan Sanjar and the old woman." This phase probably occurred *c.* 1505, the date found on a painting removed from the manuscript several decades ago.[15] Unfortunately, the names of the two or three different painters involved are not recorded, but Sultan Muhammad may well have been among them.

An analysis of Sultan Muhammad's paintings from the *Shahnama* shows his debt to the special artistic climate of Tabriz and underscores the continuity of taste which links the first decades of the Safavid era with that of the Aq Qoyunlus. The parallels between certain details in his paintings and materials from the albums now in Istanbul also suggest that he had access to those paintings or others which closely resembled them.

Sultan Muhammad and the *Divan* of Hafiz

Evidence for Sultan Muhammad's personal evolution during the reign of Shah Tahmasp is found primarily in a single manuscript, a copy of the *Divan* of Hafiz. This volume lacks a colophon, but does contain one illustration signed by Shaykhzada that depicts a group of people listening to the exhortations for repentance in a mosque, and two signed by Sultan Muhammad (Figs. 6, 8).[16] One of these portrays an enthroned prince surrounded by his courtiers celebrating the end of Ramadan (Figs. 8, 9), the other a tavern and a group of intoxicated celebrants (Fig. 6).

The *Divan* illustrations differ significantly from those in the *Shahnama.* In "The



2. "Sa'd fights demons" (Muhammad b. Husam al-Din's *Khavarnama*). Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Dublin, Pers. ms. 293, no. 1.

feast of 'Id," Sultan Muhammad uses a canon of figural proportion that is close to the norm for Safavid painting but with wider shoulders and less elongated torsos (Figs. 8, 9). Several participants in the drinking scene, however, have unusually large heads and narrow shoulders, a detail which may be intended to give the painting an air of caricature (Fig. 6).

The most striking feature of Sultan Muhammad's paintings from the *Divan* is the way architecture is used to structure and unify the compositions. In one, the tavern is an octagonal kiosk with two storeys of rooms. It has an entrance and balcony which project to the left (Fig. 6). The building in "The feast of 'Id" also appears to be a polygonal pavilion; the seated prince is framed by an arch, a woman peeks out of a second-storey window, and attendants are visible through a door to the right (Fig. 8).

Several other Safavid paintings show figures in a polygonal building—including "The nightmare of Zahhak" and "Firdausi proves his talent before Sultan Mahmud" from Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnama*, both of which have been attributed to Mir Musavvir.[17] Another useful comparison is "Khusraw and Shirin after their wedding feast" from a manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsa* now in the John Rylands Library, Manchester,[18] illustrated *c.* 1530, that is a simplified replica of Zahhak's nightmare from the Tahmasp *Shahnama* (Fig. 7). In all cases, the composition is dominated by a polygonal kiosk with figures on three levels who are unified by their reaction to a single event.

In Sultan Muhammad's painting, the figures are united by the act of drinking and its effect. At the centre of the painting is a man, perhaps intended to represent Hafiz, who appears to be offering a book, possibly of his poetry, to a youth in exhange for a flask of wine. This theme of drinking is also stressed by the group of angels on the building's roof, and by a single line of text which describes how one angel gives another a cup of wine, causing her face to become flushed. This gesture is repeated by the celebrants within and in front of the tavern. The eccentric behaviour and casual grouping of celebrants before the tavern is intended to convey the varied ways in which different people react to the wine. The painting also contains small touches of order such as the neat row of cups and flasks placed over the door of the chamber holding the wine vessels.

The painting illustrates an important theme in the poetry of Hafiz, drawing a parallel between drinking and the source of creative inspiration behind the writing of poetry. In this composition Sultan Muhammad has linked elements mentioned by Hafiz in various verses of the ghazal.[19] The setting is described as the *saray-i mughan,* the residence of Magians or Fire-Worshippers. In this case the light is provided not by a sacred fire but by the glittering cups of wine and the radiant faces of beautiful youths. The participation of angels in the celebration alludes among other things to the pleasures of paradise.

Although at first sight this painting appears strikingly different from the scenes in the *Shahnama* mentioned above, a closer examination suggests some points of comparison. Most notable is the conception of human anatomy seen, for instance, in the bearded musician to the left of the centre. He has the large head, narrow shoulders and small hands of figures in Sultan Muhammad's illustrations for the *Shahnama* (Figs. 4, 6). Also, several figures in the middle zone of the painting are considerably larger in scale than those in the foreground.

"The feast of 'Id" has two focal points; the most obvious is the youthful prince on his throne silhouetted against a golden ground and surrounded by courtiers, a



3. "Blossoming branch with birds and butterflies." Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, Hazine 2153, fol. 51b.

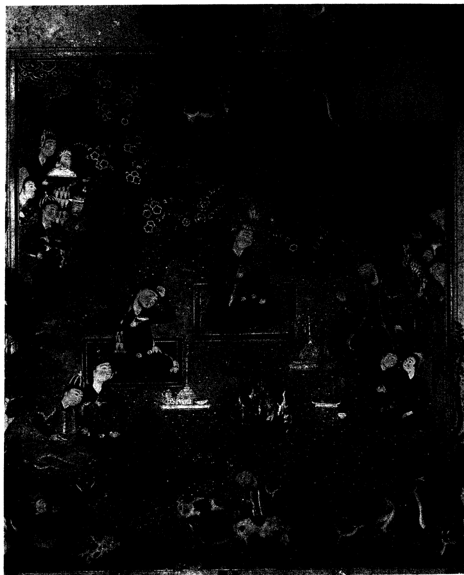
second is the faint silhouette of a new moon visible in the upper left corner of the painting (Figs. 8, 9). This appearance of a new moon signals the end of Ramadan and several figures on the roof have their hands raised in prayer. A line from Hafiz inscribed on the wall of the building links and contrasts these two themes:

It's the 'Id and a time for roses—and a goodly company await.

Saqi: See the moon in the face of the Shah—and bring the wine.[20]

The face of the shah is compared with the new moon which signals the end of Ramadan. Another element in this verse, the coincidence of the 'Id with the blooming of roses, is represented by several figures who pick or hold roses.

The use of an architectural setting to frame a royal celebration was popular with Safavid painters, and Sultan Muhammad's painting can be compared with one of "Khusraw enthroned" from a copy of Nizami's *Khamsa* made for Shah Tahmasp.[21] Both paintings show a royal figure enthroned beneath an arch, and both allude to a garden setting by showing cypresses and poplars in rhythmic alternation across the top of the picture. There are also, however, important differences between their compositions. The *Khamsa* painting has a radial structure with lines of courtiers focused on the central seated ruler, whereas in the *Divan* illustration the composition is an open coil with the prince at its centre, a scheme reminiscent of Sultan Muhammad's painting "The court of Gayumars."



Illustrations showing royal audiences often have a double message in manuscripts made for princely patrons—on the one hand they depict an event mentioned in the text, and on the other they convey a message about the manuscript's patron. Thus, the *Khamsa* illustration shows Khusraw's accession to the throne at the Sassanian palace known as "Taq-i Kisra" (Khusraw's Vault), located near modern Baghdad, but in a metaphorical sense it also celebrates the accession of Shah Tahmasp, whose lineage and titles are inscribed on the building's cornice. The painting may also reflect Shah Tahmasp's desire to regain control of Baghdad, lost to the Ottomans several years earlier.

Various details of the *Divan* painting also suggest it had a personal significance beyond the obvious illustration of a text. Inscriptions are found on the cornice of the building, over its door and on the prince's throne (Figs. 8, 9). The ghazal illustrated is indeed addressed to a ruler, and the two lines from it inscribed on the building's cornice stress its royal message. The first, comparing the shah's face to the new moon, sets the mood for the painting as a whole; the second contains wishes for his prosperity and good fortune,[22] a theme repeated in inscriptions on the royal throne (Fig. 9). They are located in seven cartouches on a gold-brocaded cloth. At the centre is the painter's signature: "*'Amal-i* Sultan Muhammad" ("The work of Sultan Muhammad"), and around it are six half medallions inscribed with prayers on the ruler's behalf.[23]

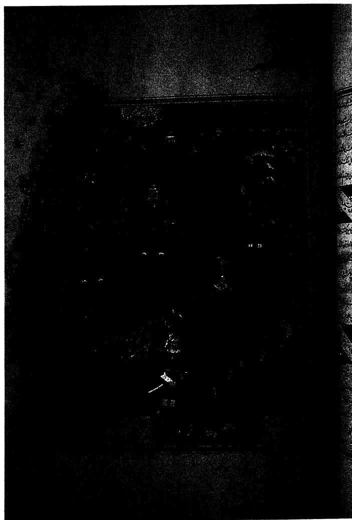
The message of these inscriptions is clear enough, but there is considerable confusion over the question of the person to whom these wishes are addressed. Another inscription over the door to the right reads: "al-Ghazi Abu'l-Muzaffar Sam Mirza," and this manuscript has long been ascribed to his patronage. Recently M. Dickson called attention to two problems with this inscription: that "Abu'l-Muzaffar" is the epithet used by Shah Tahmasp, whereas Sam Mirza is usually known as "Abu'l-Nasr;" and that its appearance suggests the inscription was rewritten to replace the shah's name with that of his brother.[24]

Paradoxically, although the *Divan* manuscript contains signed paintings by two prominent sixteenth-century painters, Shaykhzada and Sultan Muhammad Iraqi, the circumstances which led to its creation have remained enigmatic. Shaykhzada is closely associated with Herat and probably was taken to Bukhara by the Uzbek ruler, Ubayd Khan, in 1530, whereas Sultan Muhammad is known to have lived in Tabriz. The presence of their paintings in a single manuscript has led scholars to conclude that either Shaykhzada spent a short time in Tabriz, or Sultan Muhammad lived for some time in Herat.[25]

There is no inherent reason, however, why these two groups of paintings need to have been executed at the same time and in the same place. Evidence from the paintings themselves suggests they belong to two distinct phases. The two paintings by Shaykhzada, comprising the scene in a mosque and a now lost depiction of a princely figure at a polo match, have as their main protagonist a mature man with a moustache, whereas three others give the place of honour to a youthful prince.

The scene in a mosque by Shaykhzada and the paintings by Sultan Muhammad also differ significantly in their colouration. Shaykhzada's painting is notable for its muted and subtle tones. Sultan Muhammad, however, stresses a few basic colours—blue, red, yellow and green. In "The feast of 'Id," the frequent repetition of the same tones of these colours contributes significantly to the integrity of the composition (Figs. 8, 9).

4. "The feast of Sadeh," Sultan Muhammad (Firdausi's *Shahnama*). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., 1970, 1970. 301.2.



5. "Iskandar and the dying Dara" (Nizami's *Khamsa*). Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, Hazine 762, fol. 233a.

Shaykhzada's preference for subtle gradations in colour echoes that of Behzad and other painters at the Timurid court in Herat,[26] whereas Sultan Muhammad's preference for bold, mostly primary colours is reminiscent of paintings executed in Tabriz and Shiraz including the Safavid portions of "Sultan Sanjar and the old woman" from Hazine 762.[27]

Shaykhzada's ties with Herat are evident not only in his style but also because his paintings are in texts copied by calligraphers from that city including Mir Ali al-Haravi, Ali Hijrani and particularly Sultan Muhammad Nur.[28] Indeed, the *Divan* manuscript appears to be in the hand of Sultan Muhammad Nur. His writing has a distinctive delicacy created by the use of a narrow pen and by rarely using it to the full width.[29]

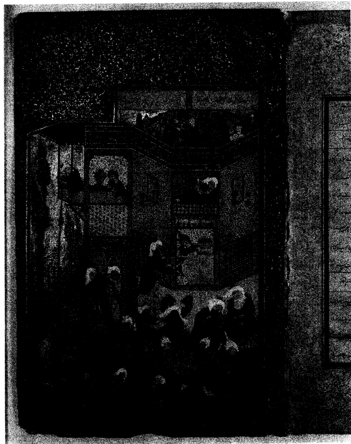
Shaykhzada's paintings also contain important clues about the original patron of the manuscript. He is probably represented in the mature man who sits apart from the congregation within the *eyvan* (archway) in the mosque scene and who is honoured by a retinue in the polo game.[30] The latter painting is particularly significant because the ghazal illustrated contains numerous allusions to military power and domination.[31] Pictorial evidence suggests that the manuscript's patron was a powerful military figure with attributes of a ruler. If Shaykhzada's paintings were executed in Herat, then the patron should have been a prominent figure in that city.

The Safavid rulers appointed royal princes as the governors of important provinces, but they were customarily under the protection of a powerful amir who was the *de facto* ruler of that territory. Thus, Sam Mirza was sent to Herat by Shah Isma'il and remained there during the first years of Shah Tahmasp's reign. His military protectors were all from the Shamlu tribe, and the most important of them was his cousin Husayn Khan Shamlu. They were together in Herat from 1525 until October of 1529 when they and their close associates evacuated the city during a siege by the Uzbek leader, Ubayd Khan.[32] After their departure Ubayd Khan occupied the city for nearly a year, and when he returned to Bukhara he took with him calligraphers, painters and bookbinders. Shaykhzada was possibly among them.[33]

Sam Mirza, Husayn Khan and his troops wandered through the countryside for more than a year, finally rejoining the Safavid court at Isfahan in the summer of 1531. This reunion was far from peaceful, for Husayn Khan attacked and killed Shah Tahmasp's chief amir in the ruler's own tent. Other amirs at court also rebelled and in July 1531 the shah was forced to replace the murdered man, Juha Sultan, with Husayn Khan, who thereby became the most powerful military figure at the Safavid court and in many respects the virtual ruler of Iran.[34]

The Safavid court, which included Husayn Khan, Sam Mirza and, of course, Shah Tahmasp, spent the winters of 1531-32 and 1532-33 in Tabriz. During this period Shah Tahmasp's territory was under attack by both the Ottomans and the Uzbeks and these conflicts also affected his relations with Husayn Khan Shamlu and Sam Mirza.[35]

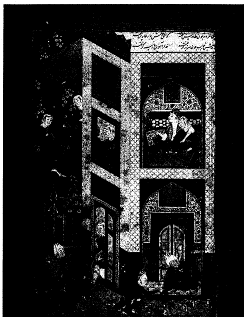
In the spring of 1533, Sam Mirza was once again appointed governor of Herat and given the protection of a Shamlu amir. His installation coincided with an Ottoman invasion and was soon followed, in the summer of 1533, by Husayn Khan's execution because of his involvement in a plot to replace Shah Tahmasp with Sam Mirza. This plot, which involved the collusion of the Ottomans and possibly the Uzbeks, included an attempt to poison the shah. Despite the death of his most powerful supporter, Sam Mirza did make some abortive attempts at rebellion for which he soon had to ask his brother's forgiveness, blaming his actions on bad advice from his amirs.[36]



6. "Worldly and otherworldly drunkenness," Sultan Muhammad (Hafiz's *Divan*). Promised gift of Mr and Mrs Stuart Cary Welch, Jr., partially owned by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., 1988. 430.

When these events are combined with internal evidence from the *Divan* of Hafiz, it is possible to suggest several stages in the creation of this manuscript. It may have been copied and partially illustrated in Herat for Husayn Khan Shamlu between 1525 and October 1529. When the Shamlu amirs left that city during the Uzbek siege, Husayn Khan could easily have taken it with him on his peregrinations. After he became the *vakil* of Shah Tahmasp in 1531, three more paintings could have been added to the manuscript by Sultan Muhammad in Tabriz.

It is possible that Husayn Khan wished to celebrate his new power by presenting the manuscript to Shah Tahmasp. On the other hand, the addition of Sam Mirza's name to "The feast of 'Id" may have a connection with the plot to elevate him to the throne, a plot evidently conceived by Husayn Khan Shamlu and his allies.



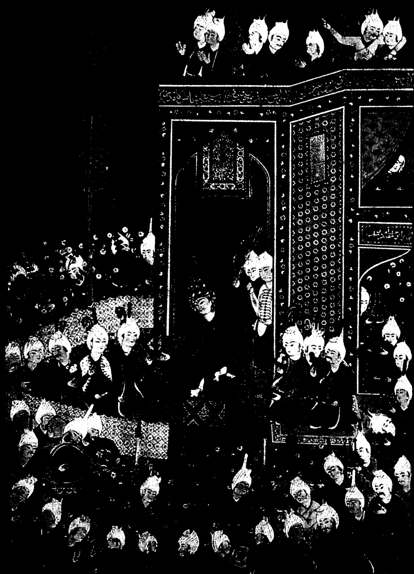
7. "Khusraw and Shirin after their wedding feast" (Nizami's *Khamsa*). John Rylands Library, Manchester, Pers. MS 3, fol. 55a.

Conclusion

Sultan Muhammad was clearly a painter of unusual talent and subtlety. His paintings for the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp draw upon the heritage of Tabriz but gradually the artist must have accommodated himself to new compositional trends at the Safavid court. His later works from the *Divan* of Hafiz use schemes which are paralleled in other Safavid court paintings, but Sultan Muhammad's illustrations are unequalled in their subtle linking of verbal and visual imagery.

NOTES

1. M. Dickson and S. C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London, 1981).
2. S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1976), pp. 20-21, pls. 15-18.
3. A painting on folio 516v in the *Shahnama* is dated to 934/1527-28 (Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh,* II, no. 216) and since the paintings most closely associated with Sultan Muhammad's are at the beginning of the text they may have been executed a few years earlier; for the date of the *Divan* of Hafiz see below section titled "Sultan Muhammad and the *Divan* of Hafiz."
4. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh,* I: 51-54, 242-43.
5. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh,* I, colour plates nos. 7, 8; II, no. 7.





8. "The feast of 'Id," Sultan Muhammad (Hafiz's *Divan*). Private Collection.

9. "The feast of 'Id" (detail of the enthroned prince), Sultan Muhammad (Hafiz's *Divan*). Private Collection.

6. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, II, nos. 8, 9, 10; due to constraints of space other examples attributed to Sultan Muhammad will not be discussed here; on these see ibid., I: 56-86.
7. H. Massé, *Croyances et Coutumes Persanes* (Paris, 1938), vol. 2, pp. 352-68.
8. R. Hillenbrand, *Imperial Images in Persian Painting* (Edinburgh, 1977), no. 198, p. 198; B. Gray, *Persian Painting* (Geneva, 1977), pp. 106-108.
9. N. Shatzman Steinhardt, "Chinese Ladies in the Istanbul Albums," *Islamic Art* I (1981): 77-84, figs. 110-13.
10. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, I: 30-32.
11. I. Stchoukine, "Les Peintures Turcomanes et Safavies d'une Khamseh de Nizami achevée à Tabriz en 886/1481," *Arts Asiatiques*, vol. 14 (1966), fig. IV.
12. Ibid., fig. III.
13. Arabic verses on the flap of the binding state it was made on the order of Najm al-Din's treasury; he may also be the writer of the postscript (ff. 316b-317b), for it includes an allusion to his loyalty to Shah Isma'il:

The star [najm] of the firmament is bound by your decree.

and concludes with a pun on his name, Najm Mas'ud. For a translation of earlier sections of this postscript see W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), pp. 333-34.
14. J. Aubin, "Etudes Safavies. I. Šah Isma'il et les notables de l'Iraq Persan," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 2 (1959): 65-66.
15. B. W. Robinson, "Persian and Pre-Mughal Indian Painting," in *Islamic Painting and the Arts of the Book* (London, 1976), no. III, 207, pp. 178, pl. 19.
16. S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting*, pp. 20-21, pls. 16-18.
17. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, II, nos. 3, 15.
18. B. W. Robinson, *Persian Paintings in the John Rylands Library* (London, 1980), pp. 148-52.
19. Qazvini, Muhammad & Qasim Ghani, eds., *Divan-i Khwaja Shams al-Din Muhammad Hafiz-i Shirazi* (Tehran, 1320/1941), no. 421, pp. 291-92.
20. Translation by M. B. Dickson cited in S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501-1576* (Cambridge, Mass.: Fogg Art Museum, 1979), p. 127.
21. Ibid., no. 57, p. 154.
22. Qazvini & Ghani, *Divan-i Hafiz*, no. 246, lines 1, 5, pp. 166-67; the text of this ghazal as given on the back of the painting contains a repetition of the second verse inscribed on the building but not of the first. This suggests that originally the page had a cartouche containing this first distich but that it was covered over when the painting was executed.
23. Reading counter-clockwise from the right side, they wish him Victory (*fath*), [Divine] Assistance (*nusrat*), Good Fortune (*daulat*), Triumph (*piruzi*) and [Long] Life (*'umr*). The cartouche at the lower right is illegible.
24. S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, p. 127.
25. S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting*, pp. 17-21; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, I: 39-40, 53-55.
26. S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting*, pl. 16; Gray, *Persian Painting*, pp. 116-17, 119, 122-23, 128, 131.
27. Ibid., pp. 105-107, 132; Stchoukine, "Peintures Turcomanes," fig. III.
28. Manuscripts containing paintings in the style of Shaykhzada include:
(i) Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, Hazine 871, copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur and dated to 922/1516-17.
(ii) Turkish and Islamic Art Museum, Istanbul, no. 1919, copied by 'Ali al-Husayni al-Katib and dated to 925/1519.
(iii) Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, 32.54, copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur and dated to 1523.
(iv) Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 13.228.7, copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur and dated to 1525.
(v) Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, supp. Turc 316, 317, copied by Ali Hijrani and dated to 1526-27.
29. For a list of manuscripts copied by Sultan Muhammad Nur see M. Bayani, *Khush-nevisan—nasta'liq nevisan* (Tehran, 1345), pp. 272-80.
30. For reproductions see S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting*, p. 21, pl. 16.
31. Qazvini & Ghani, *Divan-i Hafiz*, no. 108, p. 74.
32. M. B. Dickson, "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks," (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1958), pp. 18, 51, 72, 154.
33. Ibid., p. 165; Qadi Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, Son of Mir Munshi*, trans. V. Minorsky (Washington, DC, 1959), pp. 130-32; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 39-40.
34. Dickson, "Shah Tahmasb and the Uzbeks," pp. 154, 193-201.
35. Ibid., pp. 203, 227, 260-62, 272-82.
36. Ibid., pp. 290-95.

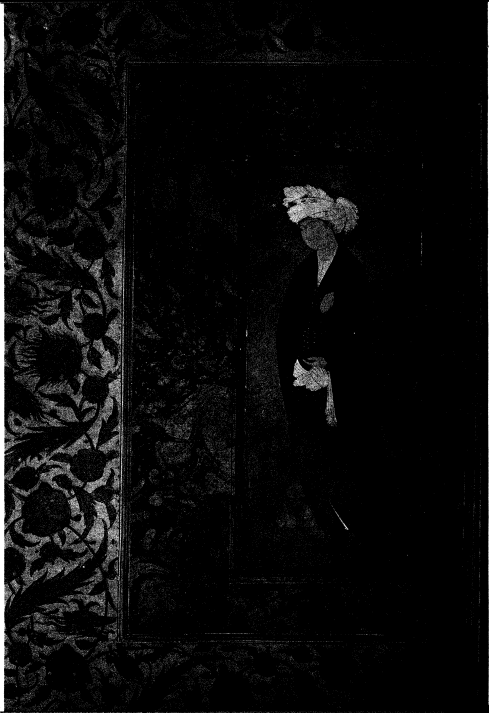
Age and Time in the Work of Riza

Sheila R. Canby

Most twentieth-century studies of Riza, the late sixteenth-early seventeenth-century Persian painter also known as Aqa Riza and Riza-yi 'Abbasi, have focused on the artist's style and the chronology of his works. Innumerable problems of authentication have diverted attention from the content of Riza's *oeuvre*. Fortunately, the tide of scholarship turned in 1964 with Ivan Stchoukine's major study[1] which treated style and content as equally important elements of Riza's work. Subsequently, Lisa Golombek, Richard Ettinghausen and Anthony Welch have investigated the interrelationship of Riza's style and content and how he expressed the spirit of the age in which he lived.[2]

Despite the variations in Riza's style, certain themes recur in his fifty-odd-year career (*c.* 1585-1635). In addition to the idea of yearning for the absent lover and metaphors for mystical union with God, the subjects of age and the passage of time unite Riza's earliest periods with his latest. An integral aspect of his portraiture is the depiction of the sitter's age. To communicate this fact about his subjects, Riza developed a visual typology for young, middle-aged and old people. In works depicting two or more figures, he often contrasted young men with older ones. Such juxtapositions both sharpen the characterizations of Riza's sitters and suggest a preoccupation with the passage of time. In addition to works that express in a general way the progression from youth to middle or old age, Riza executed a few works that allude to the passing of an era in Iran. Thus, social and technological changes of the period figure in Riza's work as they rarely, if ever, had done in earlier Safavid art.

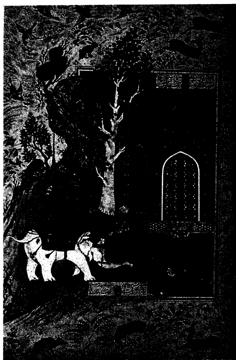
Various scholars have estimated that Riza's artistic career began in the mid-1580s and that he joined the royal atelier upon the accession of Shah 'Abbas I in 1587.[3] On the basis of their stylistic affinities with works of other artists active in the 1570s and 1580s, several inscribed, undated works, including the "Young man in a blue coat" (Fig. 1), are assigned to Riza working in the late 1580s. Standing in a landscape lightly painted in gold, the slender figure wears a vermilion robe, a thickly knotted white sash, and a royal blue cloak draped over his shoulders. Wrapped around a gold *kulah*, or cap, the figure's turban, with feathers, flower, and tufts of hair emerging from its folds, evokes a studied nonchalance. More than his clothes or even his stance, his face reveals his youth. The perfect arcs of his eyebrows, the curve of his hairless cheek and double chin, the finely



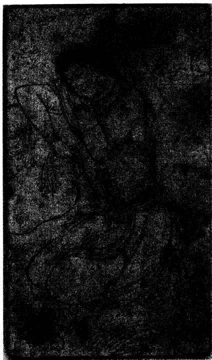


1. "Young man in a blue coat," signed "Work of the most humble Riza." *c.* 1587, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 34 x 21.9 cm. (sheet), 13 x 7.5 cm. (design area). Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Sarah C. Sears Collection, 1936. 27.

2. "Reclining nude," signed "Riza drew it." *c.* 1595, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 9.5 x 17.2 cm. (painting). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 54.24.



3. "Rustam kills the white elephant," attributed to Riza (*Shahnameh* of Firdausi). *c.* 1595, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 40.7 x 26.1 cm. (sheet). Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Dublin, Ms. 277, fol. 13a.



4. "Day-dreaming youth," signed "Aqa Riza." *c.* 1600, Safavid period. Ink on paper. 12 x 6.7 cm. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Alpheus Hyatt Fund, 1952. 7.

drawn eyes and nose, and his faint smile amount to a paradigm of youthful Persian beauty, suggesting that combination of innocence and self-confidence characteristic of attractive, privileged young men and women on the verge of adulthood.

About 1595, with his painting of the "Reclining nude" (Fig. 2), Riza departed radically from his predecessors' depictions of modest young ladies.[4] The figure lies on her side by the bank of a stream, with a transparent cloth over her midriff and thigh. The nude's ample thighs and belly, compact breasts, round face, delicate features, and long, wispy

hair must have corresponded to the late-sixteenth-century Persian ideal of sensuality. Yet, as the figure dozes, smiling, with her hand upon a poem or letter, she appears innocent and unaware of her allure. Whether Riza based this painting on a Western prototype or on a living model, he maintains a balance between the ingenuousness and the sensual appeal of the young woman. Like the "Young man in a blue coat" (Fig. 1), the "Reclining nude" (Fig. 2) seems chaste and optimistic, much as Riza himself must have been in the late 1580s and early 1590s. Whether the smiles on these figures' faces relate to memories or anticipation, they confirm the existence of a mental life beyond the spatial and temporal confines of the picture.

The young men and women in Riza's early 1587-95 single-figure portraits rarely do anything more strenuous than offer a flower or fruit to an unseen recipient. By contrast, the young men in Riza's illustrations to a *Shahnameh* of about 1587-97[5] perform strenuous or serious tasks. In "Rustam kills the white elephant" (Fig. 3) of about 1595, the protagonist conforms to Riza's canon for young men with his plump, hairless face and slim physique. Unlike the "Young man in a blue coat" (Fig. 1), Rustam's full lips and short neck increase the impression of a round, somewhat pudgy face. Rather than simply indicating a change in model, these differences herald the development of a new youthful facial type in Riza's work of the 1590s and early 1600s to which the "Day-dreaming youth" (Fig. 4) of about 1600 conforms. As with Riza's earlier portraits, the youth's pose is static and his expression suggests contemplation. Because his features are thicker than those of the "Young man in a blue coat" (Fig. 1), he appears less innocent than his earlier counterpart, but his youth is unmistakable.

During the 1590s, Riza also executed portraits of middle-aged men. The most important of these for the chronology of Riza's *oeuvre* is a drawing of the "Man holding a cup" (Fig. 5), inscribed "Design of Master Shaykh Muhammad, drawing of Aqa Riza 1000" (1591-92). Beyond its obvious documentary significance, this work provides an interesting comparison with Riza's portraits of young men. The man's bristly black moustache, thick black eyebrows, squarish face and wrinkled brow identify him as middle-aged. Unlike the young men, his eyes focus sharply to his left, outside of the picture space, presumably on the person to whom he proffers his cup. In contrast to Riza's dreamy young men and women, the "Man holding a cup" impresses one with a sense of immediacy, of being present, mind and body.

As with the "Man holding a cup" (Fig. 5), the "Man with a ram" (Fig. 6) possesses the physical traits of Riza's middle-aged male figures—a moustache, furrowed brow, thick eyebrows, and square face. Leaning forward, the man is absorbed in coaxing the ram to come toward him. The hilt of a knife, visible at the man's back, most likely alludes to the eventual fate of the ram, who will be served up at a feast.[6] Whereas Rustam (Fig. 3) exhibits little emotion beyond determination, the expression of this man is tinged with sympathy for the ram, who looks vacantly, perhaps trustingly, at his master. Both the "Man holding a cup" (Fig. 5) and the "Man with a ram" focus on the present but hint at the future by implying, respectively, the filling or receiving of the cup and the slaughter of the ram.

Two other drawings point out Riza's different treatment of figures according to age. The "Hunter on horseback" (Fig. 7) of the mid-1590s depicts a young rider patting the rump of his horse as they proceed through a rocky landscape. A dead mountain goat is fastened to his saddle, with its head suspended below the belly of the horse. Like his less athletic counterparts (Figs. 1 and 4), the hunter appears thoughtful as he gazes back beyond the horse's tail. Whether he is recalling the excitement of the hunt or imagining





5. "Man holding a cup," signed "Design of Master Shaykh Muhammad, drawing of Aqa Riza 1000." 1591-92, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. 16 x 11.2 cm. (drawing). Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2166, fol. 18a.

6. "Man with a ram," signed "Riza drew it." *c.* 1598, Safavid period. 9.1 x 14.1 cm. (drawing). Ex-Demirdjian Collection, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund, 1948. 59.

7. "Hunter on horseback," inscribed "Riza-yi 'Abbasi drew it." *c.* 1595, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



dining on his prey, he appears momentarily removed from the time and place in which he and his horse are portrayed.

The "Youth restraining a bucking ram" (Fig. 8), dated 1623, compares instructively with the earlier "Man with a ram" (Fig. 6). Unlike the man, the youth is physically and psychologically distant from the ram, showing neither the physical strain nor the emotional involvement of the "Man with a ram." By portraying the youth as mentally removed from the activity at hand, like the hunter (Fig. 7), Riza has implied here two tracks of time, the visible present and the undefined time in the youth's mind.

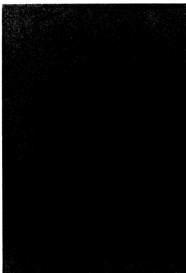
Riza has juxtaposed two distinct types of men in the "Youth and a poet" (Fig. 9), a superb drawing of about 1595. To the left an elegant, smoothfaced young man kneels holding a book toward which he gestures with his right hand. At a diagonal to the right kneels an older, bearded man who looks toward the youth and motions with both hands. In addition to the contrast in ages, the difference between the young man's turban and fur-lined robe and the older man's bare head and simple robe may indicate a class distinction. Possibly the figures can be identified as a poet and his young patron or as the older spiritual adviser and his young, courtly disciple. Even as the younger and older man appear to discuss the contents of the book, they do not make eye contact. The older man's gaze may be riveted on the youth, but the youth focuses only on his book.

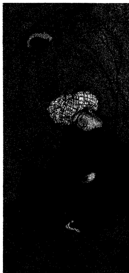
Perhaps social conventions dictated that younger men should avert their gaze from their mentors. Yet, Riza may just as likely have imbued figures of different ages with different levels of consciousness. In the first fifteen years of his career, the facial expressions of his young men and women consistently suggest a mental space and time outside that of the picture, whereas his older figures are portrayed as alert and connected to the moment in which they are depicted. Even later, as an illustration on the colophon page of a *Makhzan al-Asrar* of Haydar Khwarazmi (Fig. 12), dated 1614, reveals, the young dandy does not focus on the older, bearded man who offers him a flowering stalk and a leafy twig. Appearing at the end of a poetical treatise, this scene may be a metaphor for the poet's presentation of his work to his patron. In keeping with Riza's other portraits of youths and older men, the young man embodies the charms and limitations of youthful beauty while the older man's intelligence compensates for his lack of physical appeal.

Following the move of the Safavid court from Qazvin to Isfahan in 1598, Riza executed an opulent group of portrait paintings, mostly of young men. In the "Man in a fur-lined coat" (Fig. 10), one of Riza's typical young men luxuriates beside a pillow with fruit placed nearby. This man's head is inclined and his eyes have the now familiar faraway look. The fur lining of his cloak grazes his cheek. As if the sensation of touching the fur were an *aide-mémoire*, the young man exists in a state of pleasant contemplation, physically in one place, mentally in another.

In marked contrast to his previous portraits, Riza's brilliant "Youth and an old man" (Fig. 11), of about 1602-03, depicts a young man fully occupied with his older companion. At the left a seated young man nuzzles the fur lining of his cloak and beckons to the old man at the right. Except for the polychrome rendering of the young man's face and accessories and the old man's blue sash, the outlines of the young man's body and clothes, the old man, and the landscape elements are all painted in gold and a few strokes of black ink. Unlike his predecessors, who were either portrayed alone or averting their gaze, this young man looks directly at the older man. Both his gesture and his pose express his seductive intentions. Meanwhile, the bearded, bare-headed old man kneels, shoulders hunched, with his left hand extended slightly toward the youth. His closed, ovoid form contrasts markedly with the open, expansive pose of the youth. Apparently,







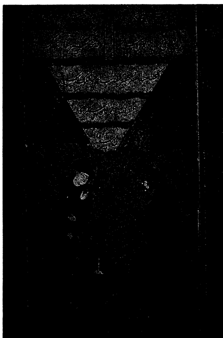
8. "Youth restraining a bucking ram," signed "Riza-yi 'Abbasi." Dated 1623, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. 9.5 x 17 cm. (drawing). The Brooklyn Museum, New York, Museum Purchase, 85. 80.

9. "Youth and a poet," signed "Riza drew it." *c.* 1595, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. Keir Collection, Surrey, England.

10. "Man in a fur-lined coat," signed "Riza drew it." *c.* 1600, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 14 x 6.3 cm. (painting). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase—Rogers Fund, 55. 121. 39.



11. "Youth and an old man," signed "Aqa Riza drew it." *c.* 1602-03, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour, gold, and ink on coloured paper. 32.6 x 21.4 cm. (sheet). Ex-Vever Collection, Courtesy of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, S86. 0292.



12. "Youth and a dervish," signed "Work of the humble Riza-yi 'Abbasi" (*Makhzan al-Asrar* of Haydar Khwarazmi). Dated 1614, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 18 x 9.5 cm. (sheet). Ex-Rothschild Collection, Paris, Aboulala Soudavar Collection, Houston, Texas.



13. "Shaykh in the waste-land," inscribed "The work of Riza." *c.* 1605, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. 13.8 x 5.6 cm. (drawing). Topkapi Saray Museum Library, Istanbul, H. 2145, fol. 11A.



14. "Bearded cavalier and two hunters," inscribed "Work of the humble Riza-yi 'Abbasi." *c.* 1625, Safavid period. Ink and colours on paper. 20.7 x 13.3 cm. (drawing). The Brooklyn Museum, New York, Museum Purchase, 35. 1027.



15. "Nashmi the archer," signed "Work of the humble Riza-yi 'Abbasi." Dated 1630, Safavid period. Opaque water-colour on paper. 19 x 10 cm. (painting). Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Estate of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, 1960. 197.

Riza has reversed the usual order of such scenes in which the older man approaches or entices the younger man (see Fig. 12). Yet the elusive nature of the older figure, the landscape, and the young man's robe, almost entirely rendered in gold, calls into question the reality of the scene. Has Riza gone one step further than his customary portraits of young men lost in thought by including the object of the young man's affections, albeit as an illusion, not as a "real" figure? If so, Riza could have adhered to the established convention of discretion while actually exposing the emotional content of such a pairing. Stylistically the painting rates among the best in all of Riza's *oeuvre*. Far from being merely clever, the technique of combining polychrome and gold paint on a peach ground may provide the clue to the meaning of the work. Even as we observe the encounter of a young

and an old man, we must question whether both figures were intended to exist in the same time and space or whether the young man is not seeing the old man only with his mind's eye.

Following the establishment of Shah 'Abbas' capital at Isfahan and Riza's remarkable portraits of young Isfahanis (cf. Figs. 10 and 11), he is reported to have spurned court life in favour of the company of wrestlers and ne'er-do-wells.[7] For a few years between about 1603 and 1610, Riza ceased to paint portraits of the young and wealthy and instead produced a series of drawings of exotic types and older men in bleak landscapes. One of these portraits, the "Shaykh in the waste-land" (Fig. 13), exemplifies Riza's preoccupation at this time with using his older figures as vehicles to express strong emotions. The bearded shaykh stands alone, his left hand outstretched in a wild, somewhat threatening landscape. The unevenly applied washes of his coat and robe, his carelessly wound turban, his beseeching gesture, and his popping, anxious eyes emphasize the spiritual unrest of this figure. Traditionally in Persian painting, illustrations and the occasional portraits of men attacked by animals or other men provided the only arena for the expression of extreme or unsettling emotions. Here, however, the intense anxiety of the figure, echoed in the agitated landscape, cannot be denied. Perhaps such a figure reflects Riza's own troubled state of mind in this period, but also it demonstrates his willingness to break with convention and reveal the vexed state of an individual unconnected to a narrative or another personage.

When Riza returned to painting courtly figures, he retreated from the intense emotionalism of the "Shaykh in the waste-land" (Fig. 13). In addition to numerous single-figure portraits of stylish youths or pensive old men, Riza continued to execute works juxtaposing youth and old age. One single-page tinted drawing, the "Bearded cavalier and two hunters" (Fig. 14), incorporates several levels of meaning pertaining to age and time. In the centre of the page a horse stands knee-deep in a stream, drinking from a fountain falling from the rocks above. Armed with a bow and arrows, his elderly bearded rider gazes thoughtfully toward the horse's head. At the left a young man with a musket slung over his shoulder squats on a promontory, filling a cup with water. Above at the right another young man tilts his head to observe the scene below at the fountain. He, too, carries a musket on his shoulder, with a dead bird dangling from its muzzle. The young men's faintly smiling, rounded faces and arching brows correspond to Riza's norms for such figures. In keeping with his other portraits of bearded old men from the 1620s, the rider appears lost in thought but avoids eye contact with the other figures. Not only do the ages of the figures differ noticeably, so do their prominently displayed weapons. The old archer has not bagged any prey, whereas one of the young men has shot a bird.

By the early 1620s, the Iranian army had finally overcome its resistance to the use of firearms.[8] Depicting the young gun-toting hunters as successful in contrast to the old archer, Riza has demonstrated that the effectiveness of guns was not limited to the battlefield and has alluded to the changes in Iranian society under Shah 'Abbas I of which the movement from bows and arrows to guns was only symptomatic. The old order in which Turkman tribes dominated the army and Tajiks, or native Iranians, controlled the administration of the government was permanently altered under Shah 'Abbas. He used Georgian slaves as his personal army and reorganized the national army according to function instead of solely along tribal lines. Thus, young musketeers such as those in Riza's drawing gained ascendancy over the old archers of the ancient regime. While the callow young hunters appear unaware of the deeper significance of this encounter at the fountain, the poignant, ruminative expression of the bearded rider must reflect a

nostalgia for Iran's bygone era and an awareness of the deeper significance of this encounter at the fountain.

During the final years of his career, Riza added some eccentrics to his gallery of youths and old men. Even the memorable eccentric portrait of "Nashmi the archer" (Fig. 15) alludes to the "good old days" of the archer-soldier. Yet, instead of evoking nostalgia, Nashmi presents an ironic, amusing picture. His sly, bemused expression suggests that a few puffs on his pipe have alleviated the indignities of age and the yearning for the glorious days of youth.

Having established an artistic vocabulary for young, old, and middle-aged figures, Riza invested each group with a different meaning. His young figures consistently possess smooth, hairless faces, gracefully arched brows, and pleasant but opaque facial expressions. Even if they hunt or read poetry, they appear too romantic for sharp thinking. By contrast, Riza's middle-aged men appear alert; one can imagine them working. His old men convey emotion and a sense of the passage of time. When portrayed with youths, they may embody wisdom or an outmoded way of life, but they always imply the fate of the young men, namely old age. Even Riza's eccentric portraits, such as "Nashmi the archer," allude to the passage of time by focusing on the sitter's old-fashioned profession. Whether Riza intended to suggest that old and middle-aged people had more fully developed characters than the young, he consistently endowed his old men with nuances of feeling absent in his youths, as if the young had not lived long enough to experience complicated emotions. While Riza may have been expressing his own yearning for the days of his youth in works such as the "Bearded cavalier and two hunters" (Fig. 14), his portraits of old men indicate a respect for age, and by extension an understanding that time shapes men and allows them to live in the past and the present simultaneously.

NOTES

1. Ivan Stchoukine, *Les Peintures des Manuscrits de Shah 'Abbas Ier à la Fin des Safavis* (Paris, 1964), pp. 85-133.
2. Lisa Golombek, "Toward a Classification of Islamic Painting," *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1972), p. 29 ff.; Richard Ettinghausen, "Stylistic Tendencies at the Time of Shah 'Abbas," Studies on Isfahan, part II, *Iranian Studies* VII, nos. 3-4 (1974): 600 ff.; Anthony Welch, "Painting and Patronage under Shah 'Abbas I," Studies on Isfahan, part II, *Iranian Studies* VII, nos. 3-4 (1974): 475-82; Anthony Welch, *Artists for the Shah* (New Haven, 1976), pp. 100-49 and *passim.*
3. Stchoukine, *Les-Peintures,* p. 87; A. Welch, "Painting and Patronage under Shah 'Abbas I," p. 479; Sheila R. Canby, "The Life and Work of the Painter Riza" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, 1981), p. 39.
4. Before the period of Shah 'Abbas I, single-figure portraits of women were less common than those of men. The standard sitter for such portraits was a young woman, fully and elegantly clothed. Riza himself portrayed at least one such woman in his early career, as did many of his contemporaries in the late sixteenth century. See Esin Atil, *The Brush of the Masters: Drawings from Iran and India* (Washington, 1978), pp. 54-55, fig. 19A.
5. The manuscript is in the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Ms. 277. It is incomplete but is believed to have been commissioned by Shah 'Abbas I upon his accession in 1587. A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, pp. 106-25.
6. Eric Schroeder, "Two Persian Drawings," *The Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum* XI (March 1950): 72.
7. Qadi Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, Son of Mir Munshi,* trans. V. Minorsky, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, vol. 3, no. 2 (Washington, 1959), pp. 192-93.
8. Although firearms had been available since the reign of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76), they were not fully accepted until the reign of Shah 'Abbas I (1587-1629).

The Worldly Vision of Mir Sayyid 'Ali

Anthony Welch

"I was transported with rekindled ardour [for art] and searched everywhere for a master and follower of the Bihzadian line."[1]

This statement by the Safavi artist Sadiqi Bek, a painter, poet, and chronicler at the Safavi court in the second half of the sixteenth century, reflects the enormous influence that the great Timurid and Safavi master Bihzad exerted over subsequent generations of painters. The artist's repute extended from Iran to the Uzbek khanate of Bukhara and to the Mughal empire of India, and Iranian painters, schooled in Bihzadian virtues, were eagerly sought out and flourished at both courts, while the works of the master himself were collected at great price by rulers who were connoisseurs, like Shaybani Khan, Babur and Jahangir. In the 1530s the Safavi artist Shaykh Zadah, Bihzad's most faithful student, who had been involved in the illustration of some of the most important early Safavi manuscripts for the young Shah Tahmasp, appears to have lost favour with his royal patron and moved from Tabriz to Bukhara where he found more sympathetic patronage.[2] In the annals of Islamic painting it was one of the most significant of migrations, since it laid the stylistic basis for Uzbek painting for two generations. Mobility of this sort was not uncommon in Islamic artistic and intellectual life: Safavi artists also emigrated west to the Ottomans and east to the Mughals, and their emigration was motivated by many factors.[3] Thus the life of Mir Sayyid 'Ali, split in mid-career between Safavi Iran and Mughal India, is typical of those of many people of talent whose particular gifts or training gave them special appeal to the rulers of Delhi.[4] A more moderate and independent Bihzadian than Shaykh Zadah, his "gift" of the Iranian classical style to the Mughal court radically altered the arts of his new homeland.

Biography and Sources

Safavi sources on Mir Sayyid 'Ali are not extensive. A *sayyid* (or descendant of the Prophet Muhammad), he was the son of Mir Musavvir who, along with Sultan Muhammad and Aqa Mirak, was one of the senior and most esteemed Safavi painters



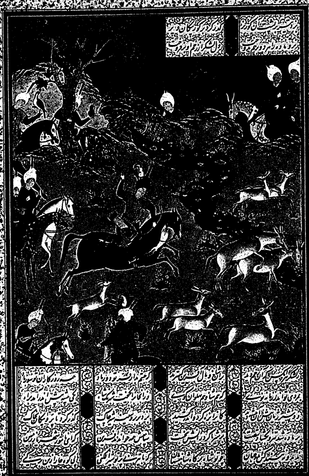
1. "Qaran slays Barman," attributed to Sultan Muhammad, assisted by Mir Sayyid 'Ali (Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnamah*). Anonymous Collection, fol. 102v. Photo courtesy of S.C. Welch.

at the Tabriz court of Shah Tahmasp (r. 1524-76). Sadiqi Bek praises both father and son and particularly mentions the son's feud with the poet Mawlana Ghazali. Due to some difficulties on which Sadiqi does not elaborate, Mir Sayyid 'Ali emigrated to India and "attained high rank under Jalal al-Din Akbar."[5] The late sixteenth-century court official and chronicler, Qazi Ahmad ibn Mir Munshi, including father and son in the same entry in his treatise, *Calligraphers and Painters*, cites Humayun's prestigious invitation to father and son to come to his court, prefers the art of Mir Sayyid 'Ali to that of his father, and reports that both painters emigrated to India and remained there.[6] Additional information about the artist emerges from his work in the Safavi atelier and makes it possible to reconstruct a rough chronology of his years in Iran.



2. "Rustam and the seven champions hunt in Turan" (Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnamah*). Anonymous Collection, fol. 135v. Photo courtesy of S.C. Welch.

The artist was probably born about 1513, when his father was already an active painter in Tabriz in the court atelier of Shah Isma'il I (r. 1501-24). Presumably trained by his father in the family profession, like a number of his colleagues, he showed early talent and by the 1530s was working as an assistant to Sultan Muhammad on the great *Shahnamah* executed for Shah Tahmasp between *c.* 1522 and 1544. His gift for rendering intricate detail in another artist's painting is clearest in the weaponry of warriors and the accoutrements of their horses in the older master's "Qaran slays Barman" (Fig. 1).[7] According to Dickson and Welch, he also was given two independent commissions in the *Shahnamah* project—folio 135v ("Rustam and the seven champions hunt in Turan": Fig. 2), datable to about 1530; and folio 568r ("Bahram Gur slays the coupling onagers with a single arrow": Fig. 3), probably





3. "Bahram Gur slays the coupling onagers with a single arrow" (Shah Tahmasp's *Shahnamah*). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Gift of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr., 1970 (1970.301.62), fol. 568r. Photo courtesy of S.C. Welch.

4. "Two Safavi grandees." British Museum, London, no. 1930-11-12-01. Photo courtesy of S.C. Welch.

completed in the late 1530s when the *Shahnamah* project was drawing to a close.[8] Two portraits from this period can also be credited to him—a portrait of a kneeling youth bearing the inscription "The servant of His Majesty the Shah, Sayyid-'Ali: A portrait of Sayyid Muhammad," and a double portrait of "Two Safavi grandees," attributed to him by S.C. Welch (Fig. 4) who has noted the similarities one would expect when compared with the work of the painter's father Mir Musavvir.[9]

In 1539, when Shah Tahmasp commissioned the 1539-43 manuscript of Nizami's *Khamsah*, Mir Sayyid 'Ali was an accomplished painter, probably in his late twenties, and he was given the opportunity to contribute five paintings to the manuscript (Figs. 5, 6 and 10).[10] By the time this manuscript was completed, Shah Tahmasp's interests had begun to shift elsewhere, and around 1545 his patronage of painting all but ceased. While most of his senior artists were either dead or retired, those in mid-career, like Mir Sayyid 'Ali, were faced with several alternatives: concentrating on the more acceptable art of calligraphy (in which the shah retained interest); working for lesser patrons (presumably with diminished salaries and perquisites) who



might be princes like the shah's nephew Ibrahim Mirza, provincial governors, other aristocrats or officials; or emigrating to the Ottoman, Uzbek, or Mughal courts. Mir Sayyid 'Ali's decision may have been easier than that of most, for when the Mughal emperor Humayun had been in exile in Tabriz in 1544, he had seen and much admired the work of the painter and his colleague 'Abd al-Samad. On Humayun's recapture of Kabul in 1546 a formal invitation was issued, and the two artists, along with the aged Mir Musavvir, set out immediately. They resided in Kabul in Humayun's employ from September 1549 until November 1554, when they accompanied the emperor on his invasion of India. On the reconquest of Delhi in July 1555, Mir Sayyid 'Ali and 'Abd al-Samad established themselves as the two leading Iranian painters in the emperor's House of Painting.[11] It was probably during this early period that two memorable portraits were finished. The first is a touching and sensitive rendering of the artist's father Mir Musavvir now in the Musée Guimet,[12] and the second is a portrait of an unidentified young scholar,[13] which bears his signature: "Sayyid-'Ali, who is 'the Rarity of the Realm of Humayun the Shah' painted this" (Fig. 13).[14]

Humayun died in January 1556, and Mir Sayyid 'Ali passed into the employ of the fourteen-year-old Akbar. Mughal sources on the artist are significant. Abu'l-Fazl lists him first among the four major painters in Akbar's atelier: "He learned the art from his father. From the time of his introduction at Court, the ray of royal favour has shone upon him. He has made himself famous in his art, and has met with much success."[15] Badaoni lists him under his pen-name of Juda'i ("The Loner"),[16] records several of his verses, and describes him as a "versatile man, each of whose paintings is a masterpiece." He specifically cites Mir Sayyid 'Ali's supervision of the *Hamzanamah* project. While we know from such praise that his work was much appreciated, we have no further signed or securely attributable work from this second half of his career. He must have watched with some interest the expansion of the Mughal state under Akbar's brilliant leadership and been very busy with the artistic and administrative tasks of completing the giant *Hamzanamah* project, where his influence is evident in details that vividly recall his earlier work (Fig. 14). For the most part he would have resided in Delhi and Agra. Sometime between 1560 and 1570, the artist requested and received permission to set out on a pilgrimage to Mecca. It is not certain that he ever came back.[17]

Style and Content

A definition of Mir Sayyid 'Ali's mature style in Iran must rest upon his three contributions to the 1539-43 *Khamsah* for Shah Tahmasp that bear his name in the same hand that ascribed the other paintings in the manuscript. In the sole miniature by Mir Sayyid 'Ali still bound in the *Khamsah* (Fig. 5), Majnun is brought in chains to Layla's camp, but the actual subject-matter occupies only the lower right, where a dog barks angrily at the emaciated Majnun. The painter has reduced the illustration of the text to the barest minimum, and has devoted loving attention to details of camp life. Women prepare food in the upper right; shepherds tend their flocks and pass the time with music-making in the upper left; in the centre a large white tent shelters two women tending a child; and in the lower left three boys fling stones at Majnun. The painting is a collection of vignettes, and its debt to the great realist Bihzad is obvious. But Mir Sayyid 'Ali's attention to detail is all but compulsive. Lines

5. "Majnun brought to Layla's camp in chains" (Shah Tahmasp's *Khamsah* of Nizami). The British Library, London, Or. 2265, fol. 157v. Photo courtesy of S.C. Welch.



6. "The meeting of the clans" (dispersed folio from Shah Tahmasp's *Khamsah* of Nizami). Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the Collection of Louis J. Cartier (1958.75). Photo: Anthony Welch.

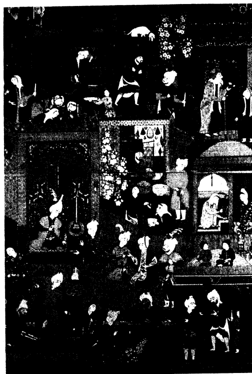
to tents are taut and neatly pegged, as if instructing the viewer how to set one up. Their ornament is not just rich but also lovingly recorded. The dog's legs are dirty from the stream, and we can count the links of the chain around his neck as accurately as those of Majnun's chain. It is a meticulously observed and meticulously recorded scene, and one can assume either that Mir Sayyid 'Ali was constantly sketching the details of his surroundings or that he was gifted with an extraordinary visual memory. Though the painting is carefully composed, the details attract, not the composition.







7-9. Details of "The meeting of the clans." Photos: Anthony Welch.



10. "Night-time in a palace" (Shah Tahmasp's *Khamsah* of Nizami). Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., Gift of John Goelet, formerly in the Collection of Louis J. Cartier (1958.76). Photo: Anthony Welch.

In "The meeting of the clans" (Fig. 6), the tents are even richer and more abundant: simurgs careen over the rich red cloth at the left in front of a tent of the lushest green. Donkeys, camels, and a cow are shown in formal and immobile profiles, while goats turn in various poses, the texture of their coats rendered with the greatest care. Details show how things work as if they were presenting us with a manual of instruction. A woman at the right makes thread; a boy near her pours water from an elaborate container for a woman inside a white tent (Fig. 7), and we see not only the carpet and kilim inside the tent but also observe that her shoes at the tent door are not parallel, that the tent entrance flap is held up with three poles bound with a golden circle from which hangs a golden hook and a complex iron loop, the latter supporting a water bag, and that the water is being poured a bit too fast and splashing over the bowl rim. Another woman in the upper right (Fig. 9) wrings out clothes into a brass basin and piles her laundry (obviously still damp and speckled with water) in the blue-and-white ceramic dish behind her, and we see not just the water droplets on her hands and on the cloth but also the water in the basin churning through her efforts. Her sleeves are held in place by her rolled-up undershirt fixed at the neck with a tiny gold clasp, her hands are ornamented with a delicate





arabesque tracery, and the gentleman conversing with her nonchalantly fingers his beads.[18] Even the little cat to the left of the centre is a marvellous still life (Fig. 8): we can count the pads on her left front paw, see two of her nipples (and assume that she is nursing kittens), count her whiskers, and all but measure the size of her ears. It is a painting obsessed with the forms of this world.

The same preoccupation with the way things look and work can be seen in one of the most intricate and elaborate cityscapes in Islamic art (Fig. 10). While the subject is ostensibly the court entertainment in the lower left (that recalls similar subjects by Sultan Muhammad and his son Mirza 'Ali), the painter has lavished attention on the other three-quarters of the painting. Behind the domed entrance at the lower right a watchman fires a torch, and a woman fills a jug from a public fountain lit at night by a single candle. In the centre we see an evening market and can count every fruit and every bread as well as see the hinging of the shutters. A younger merchant weighs his produce underneath an awning in the upper left.[19] A Safavi grandee armed with a heavy mace (Fig. 11) turns to look back at a woodcutter struggling through a doorway with a load of fuel: we can count and almost identify the jewels inlaid in his mace, examine the gold tracery across his chest (delicate birds floating in a rippled pond), and speculate about the true size of the ample paunch overhanging the belt and just held in with golden clasps with green-stone centres; his candle is tightly wrapped in white strips, and on the index finger of his left hand there appears to be a large archer's ring; even the threads of the tassel hanging from his sword can be counted! To his left an old man calls out as he steps gingerly into a darkened doorway (Fig. 12). The tiles behind his head are meticulously measured and rendered, as is the perfect arabesque above his head. We can count the teeth

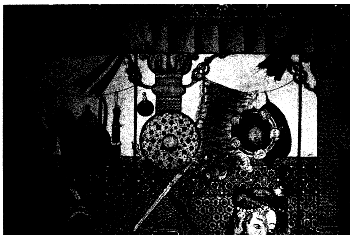
11, 12. Details of "Night-time in a palace." Photos: Anthony Welch.



13. "Portrait of a young scholar." Collection of Edwin Binney, 3rd. Photo: Anthony Welch.

in his lower jaw (and wonder if he has any upper teeth left), and admire the inlay of his slender cane. Even the lumps of fat in his lamp are admirably studied: in their shading and shaping they are so tactile that they could almost be weighed.

It is this mature fascination with the observation and exact rendering of the material world that Mir Sayyid 'Ali brings to the Mughal court. The bookish Humayun's attraction to such an artist suggests that the emperor too may have had a similar worldly bent. Despite his powerful affinity for naturalism, his son Akbar had a profoundly different aesthetic, as the famous passage about Mir Sayyid 'Ali's Iranian colleague 'Abd al-Samad underscores: "Though he had learnt the art before he was made a grandee of the Court, his perfection was mainly due to the wonderful effect of a look of His Majesty, which caused him to turn from that which is form (*surat*) to that which is spirit (*ma'na*)."[20] The Sufi distinction between form and spirit helps define the art of Mir Sayyid 'Ali who directed himself single-mindedly toward the former. It was his overriding goal to show things as they were rather than as they could or should be. Imaginative constructions were beyond him. He had no gift for fantasy and seems in his art to have assiduously avoided any subjects that might have forced it on him. His ambition centred on the daily world, and he observed it minutely and recorded it methodically and with loving care. One major element



of Islamic art—the fascination with surface colours and contours—became his overriding goal. He is our foremost source of knowing how the little things of the world looked and worked in Safavi Iran, and his details, so complete as to be able to stand alone as works of art, are essential to the development of still life studies in both later Safavi and Mughal painting. Like Bihzad, he gloried in this world and in the acute observation of it, but he was not interested in investing his human subjects with the warmth, wit and emotion so evident in the Timurid master's art. His art depends upon a sober piety as if in devout recognition that this world is a mirror of the divine world, so that the exaltation of its material objects is a distant glorification of God. This aspect of his art fitted well with the new aesthetic at Akbar's court, even if the meagre visual evidence suggests that he did not accompany 'Abd al-Samad (whose Mughal works are far more abundant) in the transition from form to spirit. As supervisor of the *Hamzanamah* project, he must have had heavy administrative responsibilities: working within Akbar's determined vision ("even inanimate objects look as if they had life"[21]) and direction, he would have been an admirable master of painstaking organization and record-keeping, and if we are to find the influence of his hand in its paintings, we should look not at its style (where 'Abd al-Samad surely had far greater influence) but at its inanimate details (Fig. 14) that perhaps carried the artist back to his youthful years with his father and Sultan Muhammad in Tabriz.

14. Detail from a page of the *Hamzanamah*. Museum für Angewandte Kunst, Vienna. Photo: Anthony Welch.

NOTES

1. Sadiqi Bek Afshar, *Qanun al-Suvar*, ed. A. U. Kaziev (Baku, 1963), Verses 14-17. Translation from Anthony Welch, *Artists for the Shah: Late Sixteenth-Century Painting at the Imperial Court of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London, 1976), p. 50. One of the most important sources for Safavi painting, aesthetics, and

technique, the *Qanun al-Suvar* has been translated in its entirety in M.B. Dickson and S.C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; London, 1981): 259-69.
2. See Stuart Cary Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), pp. 56-60; Stuart Cary Welch, *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1976), pp. 18-20.
Ed. note. For a different opinion on Shaykh Zadah's travels, see P. Soucek, "Sultan Muhammad Tabrizi: Painter at the Safavid Court," pp. 63-65.
3. For an initial analysis of these patterns of artistic migration see A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, pp. 6-16.
4. No one can approach the art of Mir Sayyid 'Ali (or for that matter any early Safavi painter) without profound indebtedness to Stuart Cary Welch whose examination of this artist can be found in *A King's Book of Kings; Persian Painting; Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501-1576* (Cambridge, Mass.: Fogg Art Museum, 1979); and most importantly in Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 178-91. Without the masterful discussion of the textual sources and the artist's career, personality, and style in this latter publication, my own abbreviated examination of this artist would simply not have been possible. In addition, I would like to acknowledge important "unpublished material," namely the many hours spent examining Mir Sayyid 'Ali's art—both original works and photographs of them—twenty years ago when I was Cary Welch's student and when my interest in this painter first developed.
5. Sadiqi Bek, *Majma'al-Khawass*, introduction and translation from the Chaghatay Turkish by A. R. Khayyampur (Tabriz, 1948), pp. 97-98. This translation from Khayyampur's Persian is by A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, p. 12.
6. Qadi Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, Son of Mir Munshi*, trans. V. Minorsky, Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers, vol. 3, no. 2 (Washington, 1959), p. 185.
7. Fol. 102v. See Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, pl. 18 (colour). These writers also identify his hand in ff. 24v, 29v, 30v, 33v, and 37v.
8. Fol. 135r is reproduced in S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, no. 20; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 2, pl. 96; and T. Falk, ed., *Treasures of Islam* (Geneva: Musée d'Art et d'Histoire; London: Sotheby's/Philip Wilson, 1985), pl. 50 (colour). Fol. 568r is reproduced in S. C. Welch, *A King's Book of Kings*, p. 176 (colour); S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, no. 33; and Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 2, pl. 230.
9. The portrait of the kneeling youth is reproduced in F. R. Martin, *The Miniature Paintings and Painters of Persia, India and Turkey*, 2 vols. (London, 1912), vol. 2, pl. 107; and Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, p. 189, fig. 246. The double portrait is discussed in the same work, vol. 1, p. 182, fig. 237. It is also reproduced in B. W. Robinson, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1967), pl. 17.
10. Only one of these paintings, figure 5 (British Library, Or. 2265, fol. 157v reproduced in Laurence Binyon, *The Poems of Nizami* [London, 1928], pl. 12, and S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting*, pl. 28), remains in the *Khamsah* manuscript now: the other four either may never have been bound in it or may have been removed in the seventeenth century when the manuscript was refurbished. Two are in the Harvard Art Museums (reproduced in Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, pls. 238 & 239); one is in the Royal Scottish Museum (reproduced in ibid., vol. 1, pl. 242 and in Basil Gray, *Persian Painting*, (Geneva, 1961), p. 134 [colour]); and one is in the Sackler Gallery, no. S86.0221 (reproduced in Glenn D. Lowry and Milo Cleveland Beach, *An Annotated and Illustrated Checklist of the Vever Collection* [Seattle: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and University of Washington Press; London, 1988], no. 412 and colour plate 59). The British Library and Harvard pages carry Mir Sayyid 'Ali's name, but neither the Edinburgh nor the Washington page do: hence, subsequent discussion here of the artist's style will be focused on the first three pages.
11. This chronology is derived from the analysis of Mughal sources in Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*.
12. Ibid., vol. 1, fig. 245; and Ivan Stchoukine, *Les Miniatures Indiennes* (Paris: E. Leroux, 1929), pl. 2a.
13. Edwin Binney, 3rd, *Indian Miniature Painting. The Mughal and Deccani Schools* (Portland, 1974), no. 10 (colour).
14. Translation from Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* 1: 190. This title, "Rarity of the Realm" (*Nadir al-Mulk*), as well as that given to 'Abd al-Samad, "Sweet Pen" (*Shirinqalam*), indicate the regard in which both ex-Safavi painters were held. The honorifics may also suggest that they enjoyed not only high positions in the Mughal artistic hierarchy but also very substantial wages and benefits. The Mughals were fabled in Iranian sources for their ability to reward talent handsomely. See A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, pp. 6-11.
15. Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami, *The A'in-i Akbari*, trans. H. Blochmann, 2nd ed., 1 (Calcutta, 1927): 114.
16. This English rendering of his pen-name is by Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*. For Badaoni's text see al-Badaoni, *Muntakhabu-t-Tawarikh*, trans. T. Wolseley Haig, 1st ed., 3 (1899): 291-92.
17. Sources differ on whether he remained in Mecca for the rest of his life or returned to India. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh*, vol. 1, p. 255, n. VIII, 26, suggest that he may have left as early as 1560 when Bairam Khan was dismissed and that he may subsequently have gone into the service of the governor of Jaunpur.
18. S. C. Welch has commented that the eyes of this couple not only do not meet but seem to be staring into an inner space, and has remarked that this is a characteristic throughout Mir Sayyid 'Ali's art.
19. Sadiqi's own brilliant, but less lovingly detailed, market scene from his 1592-93 *Anvar-i Suhayli* owes a major debt to Mir Sayyid 'Ali's earlier observation. See A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, pl. 13.
20. Abu'l-Fazl 'Allami, *The A'in-i Akbari*, vol. 1, p. 114.
21. Ibid., pp. 113-14.

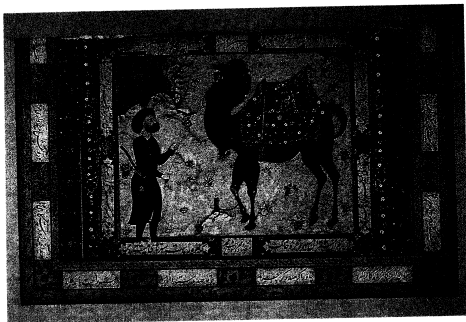
Shaykh-Muhammad

Marianna Shreve Simpson

In his well-known preface to the Bahram Mirza album of 951/1544, the Safavid artist and writer Dust-Muhammad lauds a number of his contemporaries, including calligraphers, painters and illuminators, associated with the *kitab-khana* (royal library *cum* artists' workshop) of the ruling monarch Shah Tahmasp. Mentioned third among "the scribes of the royal library who are renowned for their calligraphy" is Mawlana Nizamuddin Shaykh-Muhammad "who in speed and power of [his] pen is unequaled in the world."[1] This encomium comprises the first documented reference to an artist whom subsequent chroniclers would praise for his skill in painting and illumination as well as calligraphy, and whom modern-day scholars have established as one of the most versatile and imaginative artists of the Safavid era.[2]

Like many Persian artists, Shaykh-Muhammad seems to have come by his talents and *métier* at least in part due to the fortunes of birth. According to Qadi Ahmad's *Gulistan-i hunar,* one of the principal biographical sources of the Safavid period, Shaykh-Muhammad was the son of Shaykh-Kamal, a calligrapher with a special reputation in *thuluth* who, in addition, "wrote excellently in the six styles and was constantly engaged in the copying of the Qur'an and prayers."[3] Qadi Ahmad also notes that Shaykh-Kamal was a pupil of 'Abd al-Haqq of Sabzavar, a town some one hundred kilometres west of Mashhad in the north-eastern province of Khorasan, and later cites the same place as the home town of Shaykh-Muhammad.[4] It is likely, although not confirmed in any sources, that Shaykh-Muhammad followed the practice of other artistic families and began to study calligraphy with his father, perhaps in Sabzavar.

The *Gulistan-i hunar* does record that Shaykh-Muhammad was a pupil of Dust-i Divana, identified by modern scholarship as Dust-Muhammad, compiler of the Bahram Mirza album and writer of its preface quoted above, and one of the principal artists at the court of Shah Tahmasp.[5] It is curious that Dust-Muhammad makes no mention of any such relationship in his text when he places Shaykh-Muhammad among the small coterie of scribes of the royal *kitab-khana,* especially since he also includes himself in that élite group. On the basis of the preface to the album it is evident only that Shaykh-Muhammad and Dust-Muhammad were colleagues at the *kitab-khana* of Shah Tahmasp in the 1540s, although that does not preclude the possibility that their association originally began as pupil and master. Be that as it may, Dust-Muhammad's

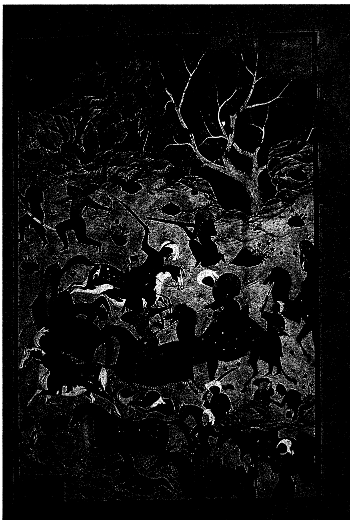


1. "Camel and keeper," signed by Shaykh-Muhammad and dated 964/1556-57. 9 x 11.5 cm. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 37.21.

preface certainly reveals Shaykh-Muhammad to have been a highly regarded member of the Safavid artistic establishment towards the middle of the sixteenth century.

His prominence at Tahmasp's court notwithstanding, Shaykh-Muhammad is even more closely identified, in both primary and secondary sources, with the artistic interests and activities of several other Safavid patrons. Foremost among these is Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, nephew of Shah Tahmasp and governor of Mashhad from approximately 963/1555-56 to 974/1567.[6] Both Qadi Ahmad and Iskandar Beg Munshi affirm that Shaykh-Muhammad worked for Ibrahim Mirza, with the earlier source even specifying that he was a retainer and received a regular honorarium or salary. The two chroniclers differ, however, on exactly where the artist was employed. The *Gulistan-i hunar* reports that he worked in the prince's *kitab-khana* in Mashhad, while the *Tarikh-i alam-ara-yi 'Abbasi* mentions that he elected to enter Ibrahim Mirza's service in Sabzavar. Certainly Shaykh-Muhammad was in Mashhad for at least some, if not all, of Ibrahim Mirza's governorship, as evidenced by a piece of calligraphy which the artist executed in "970/1562-63... at holy Mashhad."[7] The artist might very well have gone from Mashhad to his home town of Sabzavar when his princely patron was apparently "exiled" there for eight years beginning in Jumada I 974/January 1567.[8]

Neither Qadi Ahmad nor Iskandar Beg Munshi provides any specific dates in their biographies of Shaykh-Muhammad. The closest either gets to a datable milestone is when Iskandar Beg, continuing his narrative beyond that of Qadi Ahmad, mentions

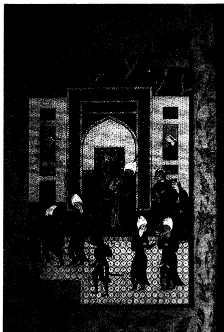


2. "Bandits attacking the caravan of 'Aynie and Ria," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang* of Jami). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 64v.



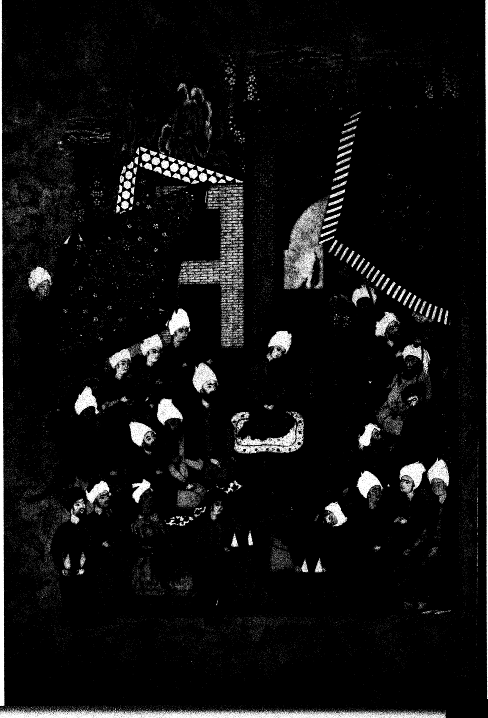
3. "The aziz and Zulaykha enter the capital of Misr and the Egyptians come out to greet them," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 100v.

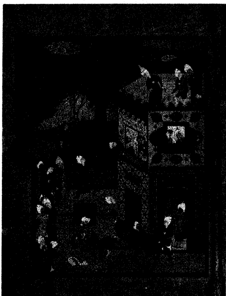

4. "Yusuf in Zulaykha's garden with her maidens," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 114.


5. "The infant witness testifies to Yusuf's innocence," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 120.

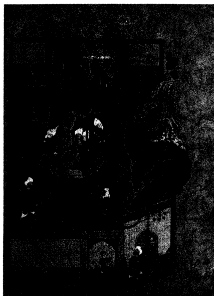
that Shaykh-Muhammad accompanied Ibrahim Mirza to Iraq, a likely reference to the prince's return to Qazwin probably in 982/1574.[9] The munshi then continues with the information that Shaykh-Muhammad was on the staff of the royal library during the short reign of Shah Isma'il II (984/1576-985/1578), which certainly implies he was in Qazwin; that he later returned to Khorasan province; and that he subsequently served Shah 'Abbas I (996/1588-1030/1629) and worked in the new palace building, all this presumably in Qazwin before the Safavid capital shifted to Isfahan in 1006/1597-98. At the time of his death, Shaykh-Muhammad was still in the service of Shah 'Abbas.[10]

The plaudits accorded Shaykh-Muhammad by his contemporary Dust-Muhammad are expanded by Qadi Ahmad and Iskandar Beg, both of whom cite the fine quality of Shaykh-Muhammad's *nasta'liq* calligraphy and his skill at copying the script of the masters in such a way that the copies could not be distinguished from the originals. It is also evident from these sources that Shaykh-Muhammad's talents encompassed a full range of the visual arts, and Qadi Ahmad states specifically that the artist excelled as a painter (*musavvir*), outliner (*muharrir*) and illuminator (*mudhahhib*).[11] As a painter he was noted in particular for his portraits, although Qadi Ahmad comments that





7. "A fickle old lover is knocked off a rooftop," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 162.



8. "The townsman robs the villager's orchard," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 179v.

he did make some mistakes. Iskandar Beg writes, however, that "no one was better than he in painting likenesses (*guneh-sazi*) or portraiture (*chihra-pardazi*)."[12] The two chroniclers also associate his painting with cultures beyond Iran. Qadi Ahmad says that it "rivaled the Chinese brush by brush" (*qalam bar qalam*), while Iskandar Beg reports that the artist "followed European painting (*surat-i farangi*) in Iran and popularized it."[13]

Shaykh-Muhammad's artistic versatility and virtuosity can be appreciated today in the small group of surviving works which bears his signature, including manuscripts, calligraphies, album paintings and drawings. In recent years the corpus of documented paintings and drawings has been expanded with a significant number of attributions.[14] By far the best-known example of Shaykh-Muhammad's work is the "Camel and keeper" in the Freer Gallery of Art (Fig. 1).[15] Mounted, and presumably conceived, as an album painting, this small composition is dominated by a large brown camel chained to a short stake. That this is a princely, or at least a privileged, mount rather than an ordinary beast of burden may be deduced from the elaborate saddle decorated with

6. "Yusuf gives a royal banquet in honour of his marriage," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 132.



a pair of winged angels amidst knotted clouds, and the colourful saddle blanket with a central medallion containing a human face surrounded with a rinceau scroll of animal heads. Judging from the camel's stiff stance, thrust-out chest and lolling tongue, it is not exactly pleased at being shackled. With a furrowed brow and the large stick stuck in his waistband, the otherwise stolid-looking attendant standing at the left betrays his anxiety at what the animal might do. Somewhat incongruously, he is spinning wool, with a skein of wool wrapped around his left wrist and a spindle in his right hand.[16] The apparent stand-off between man and beast is seen in a simple landscape of tufted lilac ground rising up to a golden sky with a single twisted tree marking the horizon. The scene is surrounded on all four sides with a border of linked panels inscribed in gold *nasta'liq*.[17] These include a complex poem in four verses, thematically related to the painting, and the artist's signature in two segments placed directly above and below the camel. This reads: "*musavvir u muharrir* Shaykh-Muhammad/*fi shuhur sanat* 964" —"depiction and fair copy by Shaykh-Muhammad/in the months of the year 1556-57."[18] There can be little doubt that Shaykh-Muhammad was responsible for executing the painting and inscribing the poetry, and for linking the visual and verbal images through the theme of humility before God.[19]

Within the context of what is known today about the artist's career and patrons, it is likely that Shaykh-Muhammad painted the "Camel and keeper," inscribed its poetic verses, and signed and dated this work while in the employ of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza. Given the date of the painting, 964/1556-57, it may have been executed in Mashhad where the Safavid prince then ruled as governor, and where, at least according to Qadi Ahmad, Shaykh-Muhammad worked for Ibrahim Mirza's *kitab-khana*. The documentary connection of painter, painting, and patron, coupled with the style of the "Camel and keeper," has led a number of connoisseurs directly to Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's most important commission, the celebrated copy of the *Haft Aurang* of Jami, also in the Freer Gallery of Art.[20] With its eight colophons, dated between 963/1556 and 972/1565, and twenty-eight splendid, and unsigned, illustrations, this manuscript has long been regarded as one of the great masterpieces of Safavid art. Much of the scholarship on the Freer Jami (as it is commonly called) has concerned the classification of its paintings by individual hands and specific artists, including Shaykh-Muhammad.

Altogether ten Freer Jami illustrations have been attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (Figs. 2-11).[21] Of these, only one attribution—that of "Bandits attacking the caravan of 'Aynie and Ria" (Fig. 2)—seems to be unanimous. There are indeed certain affinities between Shaykh-Muhammad's "Camel and keeper" and the unsigned *Haft Aurang* illustration, notably the high landscape scattered with tufts of grass and small rocks, and marked with several lightly-coloured "fissures," as well as the tree with short, bare and spiky branches, growing at a pronounced angle from the rocky horizon. Other common elements include, of course, the camel (although none of the beasts in the Freer Jami scene is as regal in bearing or as resentful of its circumstances as the album camel), and certain details such as the camel's twisted blue-and-white reins and the long straight-sided container hanging from the waist of the young groom at the right side of the Jami illustration.[22] But neither this active scene of combat, with its multiple foci and rather disjointed composition, nor the album painting, with its controlled precision, seem to have much to do, except perhaps in select details, with the other Freer Jami paintings also believed to be by Shaykh-Muhammad. Indeed, some of the illustrations seem to have little to do with one another, and it is small

9. "Majnun approaches the camp of Layli's caravan," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 253.



10. "Majnun comes before Layli disguised as a sheep," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 264.



11. "Iskandar suffers a nose bleed and is laid down to rest," attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad (illustration from the *Haft Aurang*). Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 46.12, fol. 298.

wonder that the artist supposedly responsible for them has been characterized as "something of an oddity with a highly unusual style."[23]

Of all the *Haft Aurang* compositions attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad, none is more idiosyncratic, nor at a greater stylistic remove from the signed album painting, than the illustration, "Majnun approaches the camp of Layli's caravan" (Fig. 9).[24] It is also perhaps the most notorious painting in the Freer Jami, and the one most frequently used as evidence of the style of its artist, the character of its manuscript, the predilections of its patron, and the tenor of its times. The painting is full of curious, even bizarre, features which combine with the flamboyant composition to mask, or at least distract our attention from, its actual subject.[25] Certainly this work could make one suppose that the artist was more interested in creating a pictorial *tour de force* than a narrative illustration. Whether or not, however, the painter can be dubbed "hallucinatory," and the painting "guilt-ridden, will-fully heading for oblivion" is perhaps more debatable.[26]

In addition to the "Camel and keeper," the securely documented *oeuvre* of Shaykh-Muhammad includes paintings of a yoked and bearded prisoner (Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 2156, fol. 45) and a seated woman, generally described as a princess, dressed in blue and yellow and holding a flower (Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 2166, fol. 24b).[27] The other signed works are tinted drawings of male figures. Among these is a bearded dervish, seated on his heels and with his hands tucked into the sleeves

of his robe, against a light background of foliage and clouds (Chester Beatty Library, ms. 242).[28] In addition, there are three album drawings of kneeling youths, all facing towards the left, and wearing long-sleeved shirts under short-sleeved robes tied with sashes and striped turbans wrapped around furry caps. Two are virtual twins in pose and attributes (Musée du Louvre, K3427 and Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 2166, fol. 9v).[29] Each of these fellows holds a long-stemmed flower in his left hand while looking down towards an open book held up in his right hand.[30] Each also has a pen and penknife hanging from the sash around his waist and resting on his left leg. The third member of this youthful troika has been identified as a prince, apparently because of his elegant turban plume, turban pin, and dangling ear-ring (Fig. 12).[31] He is also distinguished from the "twins" by his level gaze, fixed on the green parakeet which he holds instead of a book in his upraised right hand. With his other hand he grasps a pen just above the penknife hanging straight down along his leg. There is also a pen-case stuck into his sash on the other side. The Louvre and Freer drawings are signed only "Shaykh," but the Topkapi work bears the artist's full name, thus clinching the consanguinity of all three figures.[32] These fine figure studies have been variously dated from *c.* 1555 to 1575; in any event, they bespeak the sure hand of a mature master.

From the last phase of Shaykh-Muhammad's career comes another important drawing—that of a mustachioed man with a pillow and a winecup seated in a landscape (Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 2166, fol. 18).[33] This is signed very clearly at the left side: "*tahr Maulana* Shaykh Muhammad *va qalam* Aqa Riza 1000"—"design of Shaykh-Muhammad, pen of Aqa Riza 1591-92." Here we have Shaykh-Muhammad towards the end of his life collaborating with a much younger artist soon to emerge as perhaps the most innovative master at the court of Shah 'Abbas. The pose of the figure is Shaykh-Muhammad's; the handling of line and landscape is pure Riza; and the combination of the two reveals much about formal developments during the second half of the sixteenth century.

As a group the signed works of Shaykh-Muhammad reveal a controlled draughtsmanship, such as one might expect from an artist also proficient in calligraphy; compact and somewhat, although by no means overly, attenuated figures; pensive, but not necessarily personalized, faces; carefully rendered landscape backgrounds; and one arrogant camel. All in all, they reflect an artist adept in and comfortable with the dominant stylistic mode and artistic standards of the Safavid period.

NOTES

This article is preliminary to a more thorough discussion of the career and *oeuvre* of Shaykh-Muhammad included in a forthcoming monograph on the *Haft Aurang* of Jami (Freer Gallery of Art, 46.12). I am pleased to acknowledge the assistance of Dr Massumeh Farhad at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, in its preparation. I am grateful as well to Professor Wheeler Thackston, Harvard University, for advice on various linguistic points.

1. A new translation of Dust-Muhammad's preface appears in W. M. Thackston, *A Century of Princes: Sources on Timurid History and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1989), pp. 335-50 (p. 348 for the description of Shaykh-Muhammad).

2. Virtually all of what is known about Shaykh-Muhammad's life and career comes from: Qadi Ahmad Qumi, *Gulistan Hunar*, ed. Ahmad Suhayli-Khwansari (Tehran: Kitab-khaneh-yi Manuchehri, 1359/1980), p. 142; Qadi Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters: A Treatise by Qadi Ahmad, Son of Mir Munshi*, trans. V. Minorsky (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, 1959), pp. 187-88; Iskandar Bek Munshi, *Tarikh-i 'Alam-aray-i Abbasi*, ed. Iradj Afshar, 2 vols. (Tehran: Chapkhaneh-yi Musavi, 1335/1956) I: 172; Eskandar Beg Monshi, *History of Shah 'Abbas the Great*, trans. R. Savory (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), p. 273. Modern sources include: M. Bayani, *Ahval va Asar Khushnivisan*, 3 vols. (Tehran: Intisharat 'Ilmi, 1345-48/1966-69) III: 741-42, 825-26 and 837-38; I. Stchoukine, *Les Peintures de Manuscrits Safavis de 1502 à 1581* (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1959), pp. 46-47 [hereafter Stchoukine, *MS*]; I. Stchoukine,

"Maulana Shaykh Muhammad, Un Maitre de l'École de Meshhed du XVIe Siècle," *Ars Asiatique* 30 (1974): 3-11; S. C. Welch, *A King's Book of Kings: The Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1972), pp. 71-72; A. Welch, "Painting and Patronage under Shah 'Abbas I" in *Studies on Isfahan II Iranian Studies* 7 (summer-autumn 1974): 459-66 [hereafter A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas"] (see also the "Comments" by Basil Robinson that follow Welch's article, especially p. 510); S. C. Welch, *Persian Painting: Five Royal Safavid Manuscripts of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: George Braziller, Inc., 1976), pp. 123-24; A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah: Late Sixteenth Century Painting at the Imperial Court of Iran* (New Haven: Yale University Press; London, 1976), pp. 156-57 and *passim;* S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501-1576* (Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, 1979), pp. 28-29 and *passim*; M. Dickson and S. C. Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh,* 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London, 1981), Vol. I, chapter VII and *passim*; S. C. Welch, "Pictures from the Hindu and Muslim Worlds," *Apollo* 107 (May 1978): 71.

3. Qumi, *Gulistan Hunar,* p. 38; Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters,* p. 75.

4. This is confirmed by Iskandar Beg Munshi who gives Shaykh-Muhammad's name with the *nisba* Sabzavari.

5. Qumi, *Gulistan Hunar,* pp. 135-36 (Dust-i Divana) and 142; Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters,* pp. 180 (Dust-i Divana) and 187; A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 460; and Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 119a, 126a, 165b, 168b-174b. As Dickson and Welch point out (*The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 119a), there is a separate entry for Dust-Muhammad in the *Gulistan-i hunar* (Qumi, *Gulistan Hunar,* p. 90; Ahmad, *Calligraphers and Painters,* pp. 146-47).

6. The exact dates of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's tenure in Mashhad remain problematic.

7. Topkapi Saray Museum, Istanbul, H. 2137, fol. 18v. See Bayani, *Ahval va Asar Khushnivisan* III: 837-38; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 251b, n. 3.

8. As with the dates of Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's governorship in Mashhad, that of his departure for Sabzavar is subject to verification.

9. This is yet another date in Ibrahim Mirza's biography on which scholarly opinion is divided.

10. Considering the dearth of dates in the primary sources, modern scholars have been obliged to reconstruct Shaykh-Muhammad's biography on the basis of other historical evidence, notably the life of his patrons. As indicated in previous notes, the career of the artist's principal patron, Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, itself poses a number of chronological problems. It is inevitable that there are inconsistencies in the following chronologies proposed for Shaykh-Muhammad during the period he worked for Sultan Ibrahim Mirza, Shah Isma'il II and Shah 'Abbas.

A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 460:

964/1556-57	to Mashhad with Sultan Ibrahim Mirza
978-79/1570-72	return to Qazwin with Ibrahim Mirza
984/1576	in atelier of Shah Isma'il II
985/1577	departure from Qazwin for Khorasan
995/1587	return to Qazwin to join atelier of Shah 'Abbas
no later than 1005/1596-97	death

Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 167a-168a [Hijra dates not given]:

1556	in Mashhad with Sultan Ibrahim Mirza
1567	to Sabzavar with Ibrahim Mirza
1574	return to Qazwin with Ibrahim Mirza
1574-77	in Qazwin and in service to Isma'il II
1578-87	return to Mashhad
1584	entered employ of 'Abbas in Mashhad
late 1587	return to Qazwin with 'Abbas
shortly after 1588	death

S. C. Welch (*Wonders of the Age,* p. 196) also has proposed a three-phase development of Shaykh-Muhammad's career: his years of apprenticeship with Dust-Muhammad, the period from the late 1530s until 1556 when he worked as an independent master, and the period from 1556 to the 1570s when he worked for Sultan Ibrahim Mirza.

11. Qadi Ahmad's statement has been translated somewhat differently by Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 166a. The term *muharrir* is particularly ambiguous since it can mean someone who draws both the outlines of letters and the outlines of shapes.

12. Again, this rendition of Iskandar Beg's text differs from Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 166a.

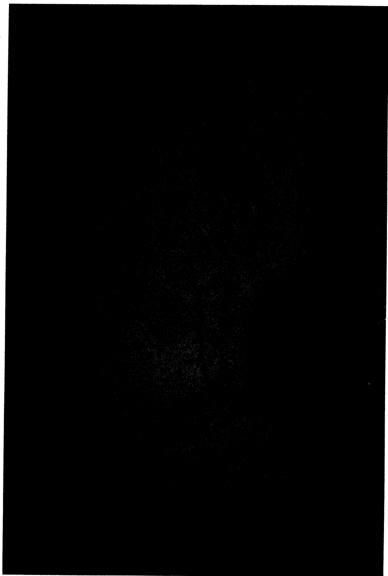
13. Qumi, *Gulistan Hunar,* p. 142; Munshi, *Tarikh-i,* p. 172. The Chinese were considered the masters of painting *par excellence;* the Qadi's comparison here probably means that Shaykh-Muhammad's painting attained the same high standards. For a further discussion of this allusion, see Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 251b, n. 4.

14. Both the documented and attributed works will be listed and discussed in the forthcoming monograph on the Freer Jami. The present discussion considers only a small selection, focusing primarily on the signed paintings and drawings.

15. Stchoukine, *MS,* p. 47; Esin Atil, *The Brush of the Masters: Drawings from Iran and India* (Washington, DC: the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1978), p. 49 and fig. 16A; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* II: 166b and fig. 226.

16. Published reproductions tend to make it look as if the man were holding on to a lead hanging from the chain on the camel's chest. There is a blue-and-white rope dangling from the end of the chain, but that is not what the man holds. It may be that this man is not actually the camel's keeper.

12. "Youth with parakeet," signed by Shaykh. Tinted drawing. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 37.23.



17. These panels are on the same sheet of paper as the painting, as may be observed from the relationship of the writing to the branch of the tree above and the man's feet below, and confirmed by direct examination. Two flanking bands of illumination and the outer calligraphic and illuminated panels, often shown in reproductions, are pasted on.
18. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 166b gives a different reading of the signature.
19. The connection between poetry and painting was first made in Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 166b.
20. As indicated above, this manuscript is the subject of a monograph currently in preparation by the contributor. For a preliminary report, see Marianna S. Simpson, "The Production and Patronage of the *Haft Aurang* by Jami in the Freer Gallery of Art," *Ars Orientalis* 13 (1982): 93-119; note 1 of this article mentions previous references for the manuscript.
21. Folios 64v, 114v, 120, 132, 253, 264, 298 are attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad by S. C. Welch (Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: chapter VII, especially pp. 168a-175b) and also accepted by A. Welch ("Shah 'Abbas," p. 460, and *Artists for the Shah*, pp. 156-57); folios 64v, 100v, 162, and 179v are attributed by Stchoukine (*MS*, p. 47). S. C. Welch dates these attributed works to 1556-65, based on the colophon dates for the sections of the *Haft Aurang* text in which the illustrations appear (Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 168a). His dating does not take into account the complex physical structure of the manuscript, nor the likelihood that its transcription and illustration did not necessarily appear simultaneously or in a chronologically coherent sequence. See Simpson, "The Production and Patronage of the *Haft Aurang*."
22. Notwithstanding S. C. Welch's comment that "One need only compare the two pictures to be convinced of their common authorship" (Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* II: 168b), a recent firsthand comparison of both works in the Freer Gallery did not necessarily confirm the similarity of all the elements cited by Welch in support of his attribution. The saddle blanket of the camel in the signed album painting and of the central camel in the Freer Jami picture, for instance, are more distinctive than identical in their decoration. Likewise the camel's keeper, who seems such a stock character, does not appear all over the place in the crowded battle scene. In fact, I have not been able to find his counterpart in any of the Freer Jami illustrations attributed to Shaykh-Muhammad, where the faces tend to be more angular and elongated, especially around the chin, and the brows unfurrowed.
23. A. Welch, *Artists for the Shah*, p. 156.
24. This composition does share one odd detail with the album painting, namely the man (in this case a youth) standing behind a canopy and alongside a camel at the middle right of the composition. Like the man in the album painting, this figure is spinning wool and has a skein of wool wrapped around his left wrist and a spindle in his right hand.
25. The point was first made by A. Welch ("Shah 'Abbas", p. 460) who also, however, takes a less tenable position about the supposedly weak connection between illustration and text in the seven paintings he believes to be by Shaykh-Muhammad.
26. Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 45b.
27. TKS H. 2156, fol. 45: A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," pp. 462-63 and fig. 1; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 252b, n. 14. The painting is signed on the tip of the bow case, as follows: "*'amal-ye* Shaykh-Muhammad"—"the work of Shaykh-Muhammad."
TKS H. 2166, fol. 24v: A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 460; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 177a and 253b, n. 15; W. Blunt, *Isfahan, Pearl of Persia* (London: Elek Books Ltd., 1966), fig. 65. The signature is inscribed vertically on the flat golden sky; it reads "*qalam-ye* Shaykh Muhammad"—"the pen of Shaykh-Muhammad." Both A. Welch and S. C. Welch compare the "princess" unfavourably to another, admittedly more beautiful, version of the same subject (in the Fogg Art Museum) attributed to Mirza 'Ali (see Marianna S. Simpson, *Arab and Persian Painting in the Fogg Art Museum* [Cambridge, MA: Fogg Art Museum, 1980], pp. 62-63).
28. A. J. Arberry, B. W. Robinson, E. Blochet, and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *The Chester Beatty Library. A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures* III (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis & Co., 1962), cat. no. 242(iv); A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 463 and fig. 2. The Chester Beatty catalogue records that the drawing is signed "Shaykh Muhammad;" the signature is not visible in the published reproduction.
29. Musée du Louvre, K 3427: Stchoukine, *MS*, p. 47; A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 461; *L'Islam dans les collections nationales* (Paris, 1977), no. 659, repro. p. 275; S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, cat. no. 76; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 165a and fig. 223.
Topkapi Saray Museum H. 2166, fol. 9v: Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 251b, n. 1; Blunt, *Isfahan, Pearl of Persia*, fig. 59.
30. Both books are inscribed with the same poetic verse, translated in S. C. Welch, *Wonders of the Age*, cat. no. 76.
31. Stchoukine, *MS*, p. 47; Atil, *The Brush*, cat. no. 16 and repro. colour; Dickson & Welch, *The Houghton Shahnameh* I: 165a and fig. 224.
32. The Topkapi drawing is signed on the penknife, and the Louvre and Freer versions are signed in minute (and now rather faint) inscriptions at the juncture of the leg and the wavy edge of the robe. In each case the artist's name is preceded by "*raqimah-yi*"—"drawing of." The Freer drawing has been incorrectly recorded as signed "Shaykh-Muhammad."
33. A. Welch, "Shah 'Abbas," p. 464 and fig. 3.
Ed. note, see Sheila R. Canby, "Age and Time in the Work of Riza," fig. 5.

The Art of Mu'in Musavvir: A Mirror of his Times

Massumeh Farhad

Persian miniature painting has been largely synonymous with the art of manuscript illustration, representing the world of real or mythical figures by taking its cue from the accompanying text. The literary and iconographic link between word and image meant that to understand and appreciate these paintings fully, the viewer had to consider them in conjunction with the text as a single *unit.* Concurrently with the production of illustrated manuscripts, artists executed independent paintings and drawings which were either bound in albums or kept loose in folders.[1] Unlike manuscript illustrations these discrete compositions were no longer associated with a literary text, and thus enabled the artist to draw upon a different repertory of themes and subject-matter. Although this particular genre enjoyed some popularity from the mid-fifteenth century onwards,[2] only in the reign of the Safavid ruler Shah 'Abbas I (r. 996-1038/ 1588-1629) did it become firmly established. In these single pages the emphasis shifted from *action* to *actors.* Idealized figures—as if extracted from the context of traditional manuscript paintings—still constituted much of the subject-matter, but artists also began depicting everyday events involving ordinary men and women. In short, instead of reflecting the elegant yet distant world of princes and heroes, these compositions often mirrored the more mundane life and simpler realities surrounding the artist.

Riza 'Abbasi, Shah 'Abbas' celebrated court painter, has been rightly credited with the establishment of this latter genre as the predominant means of artistic expression, but it is in the work of his most celebrated student and follower, Mu'in Musavvir, that the single-page composition reached its full maturity, reflecting the taste and aesthetic ideals of much of the seventeenth century.

Like most Safavid painters, Mu'in executed numerous illustrated manuscripts,[3] but his brilliant draughtsmanship, vibrant palette, and, most importantly, his keen sense of observation are best expressed in his individual drawings and paintings.

Although Mu'in's interest in single-page compositions began in the early years of his career (*c.* 1635), he executed most of them after the 1660s, approximately at the time when he had completed his various manuscript projects.[4] The reason for Mu'in's preoccupation with discrete drawings and paintings in the latter part of his career is not entirely clear, but it suggests a change in the type of patronage and support he received. Regrettably, the artist's long and highly productive career seems to have made little

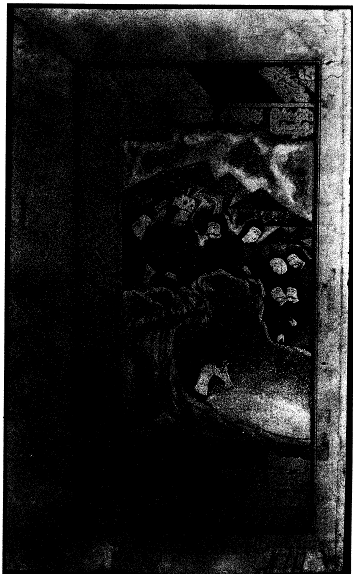
impression on contemporary writers and historians, who failed to mention his name in any of their accounts. Mu'in himself, however, was clearly aware of his own artistic talent and has meticulously signed and dated most of his single pages. In many instances, his works are also inscribed with their place of production and patron's name as well as with other remarks he considered pertinent to their fuller understanding.[5] In the absence of any other biographical information on Mu'in, these inscriptions allow a rare glimpse into the habits, methods of working and, in particular, the personality of one of the most outstanding Safavid painters.

The inscription of Mu'in Musavvir's celebrated "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi" (Fig. 8) confirms that he was one of Riza's students and already active in the mid-1630s. On the basis of the same painting, Ernst Kühnel has proposed that the artist was born no later than 1617.[6] The date of Mu'in's death, however, is somewhat more problematic. A number of single pages, executed in his style and dated to the early eighteenth century, led to the conclusion that he worked as late as 1707.[7] Although such a long artistic career cannot be categorically ruled out, it is rather suspect.[8] B. W. Robinson, on the other hand, has argued that Mu'in worked until about 1698. In his article on the so-called Cochran *Shahnama*, illustrated between the years 1693 and 1698, Robinson noticed the name of a certain Fazl-'Ali on eighteen of the twenty-one miniatures signed or attributed to Mu'in Musavvir. These rather unusual "co-signatures" confirm not only that the artist relied on the help of pupils and assistants but also that many of his later compositions were probably completed and inscribed by his followers after his death.[9]

Apart from the Cochran *Shahnama*—Mu'in Musavvir's last manuscript project—he illustrated five other known copies of the *Shahnama*[10] as well as several versions of *The Anonymous History of Shah Isma'il*.[11] The signed composition of "Rustam and the Iranians in the snow" (Fig. 1), characteristic of many of Mu'in's manuscript illustrations, belongs to the first half of a now dispersed *Shahnama*. This section bears the date 2 Dhu-l-qa'da 1058/18 December 1648, while the final colophon of the manuscript is dated 1059/1649. In this painting, the artist has combined two different episodes: below, a snowstorm has buried five of Kay-Khosrow's companions up to their lances; above, Rustam and his retinue search in vain for their lost comrades.[12] Typical of Mu'in's style, the figures dominate a schematized landscape with its wall of surging pink rocks in the centre visually dividing the two narrative episodes. As in most of the artist's book illustrations, the men are drawn as types rather than individuals, but their grief is clearly evident in their mournful, dejected faces. The menacing snow clouds swirling above their heads emphasize the pathos of the scene.

Whether depicting the deeds of legendary heroes or the campaigns of actual rulers as in his illustrations of *The Anonymous History of Shah Isma'il*,[13] Mu'in's manuscript paintings may vary in quality or finish, but they exhibit far greater formal uniformity than his striking single-page compositions.

None of Mu'in's manuscript projects includes a patron's name or a place of production, but the quality of his work has led some scholars to argue that at least some of his illustrated *Shahnamas* were executed for Shah 'Abbas II (r. 1052-77/1642-66).[14] This argument can be contested on the basis that in the mid-seventeenth century, non-royal connoisseurs commissioned some of the most luxurious and richly illustrated manuscripts. In 1632, Manuchihr Khan, the governor of Mashhad, ordered a copy of Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi's *Kitab al-Kawakib al-Thabita* (*Book of Fixed Stars*), illustrated by Malek Husayn al-Isfahani,[15] and in 1648, a sumptuously painted *Shahnama* was produced for the library of his son, Qarajaghay Khan, who replaced Manuchihr Khan as governor.[16] The existence



1. "Rustam and the Iranians in the snow," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 18 December 1648, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 34.8 x 20.5 cm. (sheet size).
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Francis H. Burr Memorial Fund, 1941.294.



2. "Portrait of a youth," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 5 February 1638, Safavid, Isfahan. Tinted drawing. 11.6 x 8.4 cm. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 53.57.

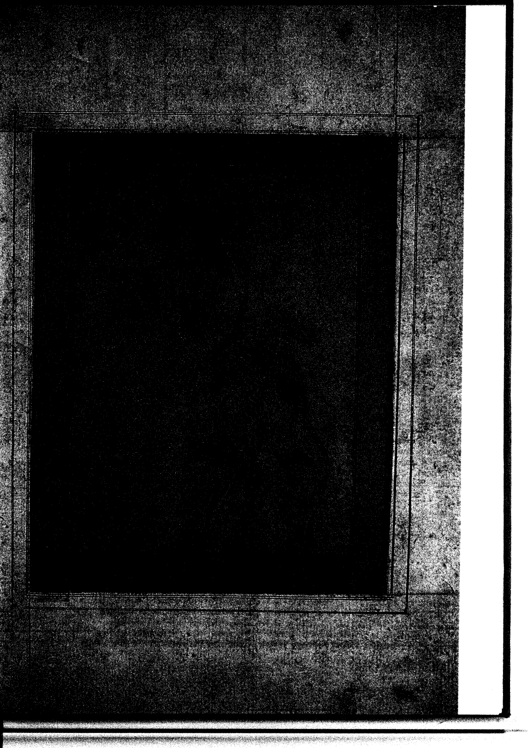


3. "Lovers," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 11 April 1642, Safavid, Isfahan. Line drawing. 13.2 x 6.8 cm. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, 53.41.

of these lavishly illustrated manuscripts suggests that during this period at least, artistic excellence alone did not determine royal patronage for a work.

With no specific reference to a royal patron or to the royal painting atelier (*naqqash-khana*) in Mu'in's work, it is uncertain whether he was actively engaged as a court painter. In fact, many of his inscribed single-page compositions imply that he worked independently in a variety of locations other than the royal studio. For instance, the inscription on the small tinted drawing, "Portrait of a youth" (Fig. 2), Mu'in's first securely signed and dated work, states that the composition was coloured on Friday, the 20th of Ramadan 1047/5 February 1638 at the house of his dear and venerable friend Shafi'.[17] Although the identity of Mu'in's host remains uncertain, this lightly tinted

4. "Youth carrying a rooster," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 4 October 1656, Safavid, Isfahan. Tinted drawing. 11.5 x 8.5 cm. Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Dublin, MS 265, no. 2.



portrait of a youth wearing a red, feathered cap and coyly looking to the side, was probably executed at an informal gathering held—as Mu'in himself has noted—at the house of one of his close acquaintances.

Another of Mu'in's early drawings, "Lovers" (Fig. 3), was drawn on the eve of Thursday, the 11th of Muharram 1052/11 April 1642, in the lane of the lining weavers.[18] Mu'in's keen interest in portraiture, seen in many of his single-page compositions, is already evident in this early drawing. While the woman's round face, large almond-shaped eyes and arching brows convey the Safavid ideals of feminine beauty, the towering figure of her companion with his hawk nose and intent, piercing gaze, like many of the artist's male portraits, is undoubtedly based on a real-life likeness.[19]

The small sketch also exemplifies Mu'in's skill and virtuosity as a draughtsman. His quick, nervous strokes defining the man's wavy hair, the bare outlines of a head scarf ending in calligraphic "splutters" and the soft, fluttering curls surrounding the woman's moon-shaped face help to infuse the otherwise serene composition with life and vitality. "Lovers" is clearly indebted to Riza 'Abbasi's innovative drawing technique,[20] but Mu'in has imbued his master's calligraphic style with greater energy and dynamism.

Like that of Riza 'Abbasi, Mu'in Musavvir's brilliant draughtsmanship enabled him to change his technique from one composition to the next and adapt his style to the demands of each individual work. In his humorous drawing of the "Youth carrying a rooster" (Fig. 4), for example, his lines exhibit far greater control and deliberateness in order to express the awkwardness of the youth lurching forward as if propelled by the weight of the large, haughty bird. The informative inscription of this tinted composition provides the exact date of the painting, Thursday, 15 Dhu-l-hijja 1066/4 October 1656, and specifies that it was done "in haste" for his son, Aqa Zaman.[21] Not only is the candid reference to the execution of the drawing highly unusual, but the artist's dedication of the work to a close person, perhaps his son, reflects some of the new "connoisseurs" who enjoyed and collected these individual compositions.[22]

Mu'in's fascination with the visual as well as *verbal* recording of people and events is nowhere better expressed than in his celebrated drawing of the "Tiger attacking a youth" (Fig. 5).[23] Unlike most of the artist's individual compositions, which focus on one or two figures, this lightly tinted drawing stands out for its depiction of a crowded and animated scene. Moreover, it includes one of Mu'in's most detailed inscriptions fitted into the narrow space along the upper edge of the composition. This claims that on Monday, the feast of the blessed Ramazan in the year 1082 (corresponding to Sunday, 1st of Shawwal 1082/31 January 1672 in the Gregorian calendar), the ambassador of Bukhara sent a rhinoceros and a tiger as gifts to Shah Suleyman. At the Darvaza-Dawlat, one of Isfahan's gates, the tiger attacked a grocer's assistant, a boy of about fifteen or sixteen years, and tore off half of his face. The boy died on the spot.

The drawing captures the incident at the dramatic moment when a group of men try in vain to restrain the ferocious animal from attacking the youth, who has already fallen to the ground. Even if it were not confirmed in the inscription, Mu'in's stylized rendering of the tiger and his stereotypic figures would have suggested that he did not execute the composition at the site of the incident. In the second part of his note, the artist complains about the cold winter and heavy snowfall which had resulted in a sharp rise in prices, particularly that of firewood. According to Mu'in, the weather had caused much suffering to people, and he himself was forced to stay at home, where he completed his drawing on 8 Shawwal 1082/8 February 1672—a week after the event.



5. "Tiger attacking a youth," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 8 February 1672, Safavid, Isfahan. Tinted drawing. 14 x 21 cm. Courtesy, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Francis Bartlett Donation and Picture Fund of 1912, 14.634.

The inscription reveals that the fatal incident, which had profoundly affected Mu'in and compelled him to record it both visually and verbally, also provided him with an opportunity to comment on other immediate, if somewhat unrelated, events such as the effects of the harsh weather conditions. Finally, Mu'in's reference to his own house as the place where the "Tiger attacking a youth" was executed is of great significance. It implies that unlike manuscript illustrations, which were executed at a particular painting atelier (*naqqash-khana*) or library (*kitab-khana*), these single pages were not necessarily linked to a specific place of production and were probably created informally at any convenient location, be it a friend's house, as in the "Portrait of a youth"(Fig. 2), or at the artist's own. In fact, Mu'in's house appears to have served as a "painting studio" for other artists as well, for the inscription of the anonymous "Reclining man" (1049/1639) states that it was drawn at Mu'in's house.[24]

Mu'in's single-page compositions for albums are not limited to line drawings and lightly tinted sketches alone. From at least the late 1640s, he produced a large number of lavishly painted individual compositions.[25] His characteristic palette, consisting of rich shades of red, orange and purple, often highlighted with a profuse use of gold, as

seen in the "Loving couple with a servant" (Fig. 7) and both versions of the "Equestrian portrait of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Tabrizi" (Figs. 9, 10), illustrates Mu'in's skill as a brilliant colourist. Most of these single paintings are meticulously finished and abound in images of sumptuously dressed, idealized young men and women. Both in drawings such as the "Four lions" (1088/1677)[26] and in discrete painted compositions, such as the "Dragon attacking a man" (Fig. 6), completed on Monday, 6 Safar 1087/20 April 1676 for an album (*muraqqa'*), Mu'in at times combined fantasy and naturalism. In general, however, his painted single pages tend to be more formal and restrained than his individual ink drawings.

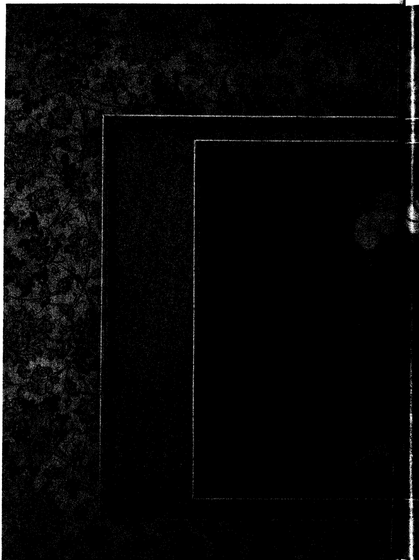
Among Mu'in's most striking painted compositions is the "Loving couple with a servant" (Fig. 7). Signed and dated 1081/1670, the painting has an inscription specifying that it was completed for an album. Mu'in executed several other versions of this particularly popular Safavid subject, but none equals the refinement and elegance of this example.[27] Complying with the artistic norms of depicting young, amorous couples as types rather than individuals, Mu'in has idealized the appearance of his subjects. Locked in an intimate embrace, the youth gazes tenderly at his beloved and wraps his richly embroidered coat around her. The girl, looking wistfully beyond her companion, has reached out towards the servant to accept a winecup. Obviously, Mu'in meant to draw attention to this exchange, for it is not only taking place in the very centre of the painting, but it even appears to have arrested the attention of the birds embroidered on the youth's coat. Mu'in's composition may be simply illustrating a lover's tryst, but the subtly interwoven gestures and wistful glances of the three figures suggest more than a brilliant formal composition and lead to a variety of interpretations, such as a visual metaphor for mystical union.[28]

Mu'in's fascination with portraiture is also apparent in his individual paintings, but unlike those examples executed in ink (see figure 4), these tend to be more formal and solemn, resembling today's official portraits. They are often inscribed with the sitters' names and titles, which indicate that these men belonged to a more privileged, wealthy class than the subjects of Mu'in's pen-and-ink compositions. For instance, in 1085/1674, the artist painted Hakim Shafa'i, one of Shah 'Abbas' court physicians.[29] In the same year he also executed a portrait of a certain Nawwab Mirza Muhammad-Baqir and his son Mirza Husayn.[30]

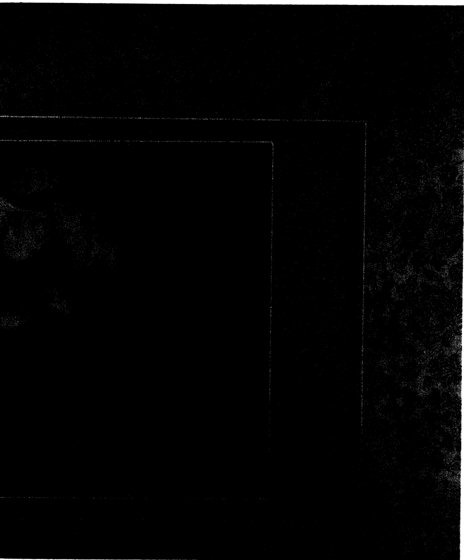
One of Mu'in's best-known paintings represents his own master Riza 'Abbasi in old age, peering through a pair of spectacles as he carefully puts the final touches to a composition of a youth in European costume. The keenly observed portrait, one of the rare paintings of a Persian artist at work,[31] recalls Mu'in's more personal and spontaneous ink drawings and conveys his intimacy and familiarity with his teacher. Like many of his other compositions, the artist has also inscribed this painting. He claims that he coloured the portrait of Riza-yi Musavvir 'Abbasi in Shawwal 1044/20 March-17 April 1635, one month before his master's death in Dhu-l-qa'da 1044/18 April-17 May 1635. Mu'in then points out that this portrait was finished almost forty years later at the request of his son, Muhammad-Nasir, on 14 Ramazan 1084/24 December 1673. On the basis of the inscription, it has been generally accepted that the artist began the "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi" (Fig. 8) in 1635, and because of the latter's sudden demise, left it unfinished until 1673, when he completed it for his son.[32] Although this appears to be a plausible explanation, it does not take into account the possibility that the two dates may not necessarily refer to the same work. According to Mu'in's own statement, his composition of Riza 'Abbasi was already coloured (*ab-rang shud*) in 1635 and, thus, must have been



6. "Dragon attacking a man," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 20 April 1676, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 20.5 x 8.3 cm. Courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum, London, 1949-7-9-011.



7. "Loving couple with a servant," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 1670, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 14 x 19 cm. Private Collection.



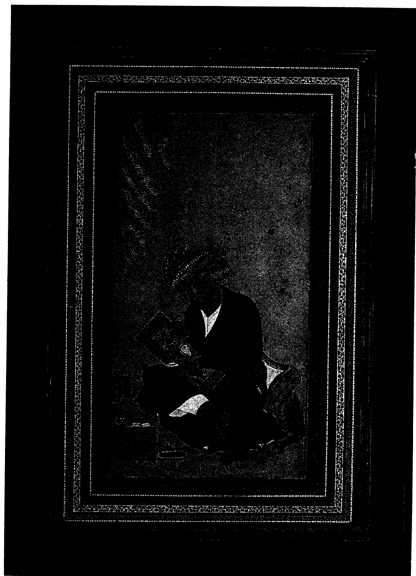
in a finished state at the time. Given the wording of Mu'in's remarks, it is tempting to suggest an alternative interpretation, namely that he executed a painted portrait of his teacher in 1635, which then served as the model for his 1673 version. This hypothesis also helps to explain the inclusion of the date 104[4]/163[5] on another copy of the "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi," which Stchoukine has attributed to one of Mu'in's followers.[33] Rather than presuming that this painting was also begun in 1044/1635 and left unfinished until 1087/1676, when it was completed for an album, it seems justifiable to argue that the 1673 and 1676 portraits of Riza 'Abbasi were based on an original executed in 1635.[34]

Another of Mu'in's highly successful painted compositions is the double-page "Equestrian portrait of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Tabrizi" with a groom (Figs. 9 and 10), a more formal work than the "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi." While the general pose of the figure on each page is the same, Mu'in has shown Mirza Muhammad-Taqi in two different but equally refined costumes. On the left, the figure is wearing a bright red robe with frogging and a fur cap and is equipped with a sheath of arrows, a bow and a sword. On the facing page, he appears in a dark purple robe with small flowers and an elegant, matching turban.[35] In addition, Mu'in has slightly altered the subject's hand gesture. The composition also includes a long inscription, written on both pages along the outer edge.[36] The one on the left claims that the portrait of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi, "...His Excellency, the exalted and lofty refuge ... of praiseworthy qualities ...," commemorates the latter's return from a pilgrimage to Mashhad. The inscription ends with the year 1[0]96/1[6]85, but Mu'in's signature and the date 27 Sha'ban 1096/29 July 1685 also appear in the lower right corner. On the right half, the annotation is couched in the same panegyric language and concludes by stating that the portrait was painted towards the end of the month of Sha'ban 1096/July 1685 at Isfahan, the seat of government.

The most unusual aspect of these inscriptions is the reference to Mu'in as the artist. On the left, he is called "His Highness, the rarity of his time, Aqa Mu'ina" and on the facing composition, the note claims that the painting was carried out by the "pearl-strung pen of Aqa Mu'in, the rarity of his time." Even as a self-assured, independent artist, fully aware of his merits, it seems highly unlikely that Mu'in would describe himself and his work in such a lofty manner.[37] These particular plaudits indicate that the inscriptions were added by an assistant or follower, perhaps Fazl-'Ali. The fact that Mu'in was not responsible for the inscriptions may also explain the first and only specific mention of Isfahan, to my knowledge, in Mu'in's work. As the inscription of the "Tiger attacking a youth" indicates, at times Mu'in has referred indirectly to the capital but usually he was more concerned with mentioning the specific locations where he executed his compositions. This practice suggests that he assumed that his patrons and admirers knew that he was working in Isfahan.

The identity of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Tabrizi is not entirely clear, but Asif's *Rustam al-Tavarikh* mentions a certain wealthy merchant by the same name, who lived in Isfahan's Abbasabad district in the late seventeenth century.[38] He was well known for his kindness and generosity, and the praises that accompany Muhammad-Taqi's name in the double-page composition are certainly in keeping with the benevolence of the merchant mentioned in *Rustam al-Tavarikh.* Asif, however, identifies Muhammad-Taqi with Isfahan's Abbasabad district,[39] whereas the inscriptions on Mu'in's portraits refer to the subject as a Tabrizi. Possibly Muhammad-Taqi's ancestors were originally from Tabriz and then moved to Isfahan, but the conclusive identification of this noble, impressive figure still awaits further research.

8. "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi," Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 24 December 1673, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 19 x 11 cm. Princeton University Library, Princeton N J Garrett Collection, 96 G.

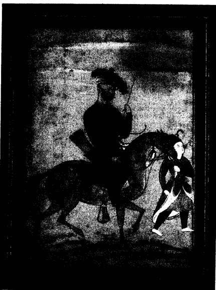


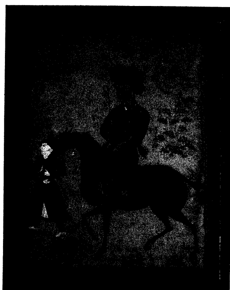
Although comprising a small fraction of Mu'in Musavvir's artistic work, the individual compositions discussed here exemplify some of the most important characteristics of his style. Without specific texts to prescribe the content of these single paintings and drawings, Mu'in chose to depict a more intimate and familiar world than that of celebrated literary personages, which he continued to illustrate in his numerous manuscript projects. Unlike some of his contemporaries, such as Shaykh 'Abbasi, Muhammad-Zaman and 'Ali-Quli Jabbadar, whose works reflect the impact of European and Indian art, Mu'in's style remained within the framework of traditional Persian painting. Active in Isfahan, he appears to have worked primarily as an independent, self-employed artist, producing individual compositions for members of the affluent middle classes and also for more humble admirers such as his "sons," friends and even for himself. Mu'in obviously took great delight and pleasure in his art and found no subject too mean or unimportant to capture on paper. His single pages, particularly his more personal and spontaneous drawings and sketches, thus became visual comments on his everyday encounters, and his individual painted works represented more formal, studied alternatives.

Mu'in was interested not only in the visual representation of people and events, but also, as many of his inscriptions indicate, in the verbal explanation of these compositions. He would often work like a contemporary "photo-journalist," trying to capture the fugitive moment in both word and image. Mu'in's habit of signing and dating his single pages and his need to annotate many of his images stemmed, in part, from his artistic pride and self-consciousness, but probably also from a practical consideration. Unlike manuscript illustrations his individual drawings and paintings no longer dealt with an easily identifiable subject-matter, nor were they produced at a specific location for a particular group of patrons. Thus, they needed to be identified and explained. Mu'in's versatile and masterfully executed single-page compositions and their inscriptions—resembling modern-day captions—not only mirror his artistic interests and aesthetic ideals, but also provide the viewer with a series of invaluable, personal impressions of the seventeenth century.

NOTES

1. For compositions made specifically for albums, see figures 6 and 7.
2. Some of the most spectacular fifteenth-century single drawings and paintings can be found in the so-called Istanbul albums, H. 2152, H. 2153, H. 2154, H. 2160, in the Topkapi Saray Museum Library. For a recent discussion of these works and a full bibliography see *Islamic Art* I (New York, 1981).
3. See note 10.
4. For the dates of Mu'in's manuscripts, see note 10.
5. Mu'in was by no means the only seventeenth-century artist to sign and date his work, but he was certainly the most consistent, and his inscriptions are far more detailed and informative than those of most of his contemporaries.
6. Ernst Kühnel, "Der Maler Mu'in," *Pantheon* 29 (1942): 109.
7. Ibid. Anthony Welch, who has also claimed that Mu'in worked until 1707, has stated that he "reportedly died the following year," but does not cite his source. See *Shah 'Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan* (New York, 1974), p. 147.
8. This view has been already expressed in Laurence Binyon, J. V. S. Wilkinson, and Basil Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting* (London, 1933; New York, 1971), p. 161.
9. B. W. Robinson, "The Shahnameh Manuscript Cochran 4 in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, 1972), p. 76. For illustrations of the works signed or attributed to Mu'in and inscribed with Fazl-'Ali's name, see ibid., Figs. 16-24.
10. (i) *Shahnama*, *c.* 1630-40, India Office Library (MS. 1256). Some of the miniatures in this manuscript have been attributed to Mu'in. See B. W. Robinson, *Persian Painting in the India Office Library: A Descriptive Catalogue* (London, 1976), pp. 1083-110.
(ii) *Shahnama*, dated 1059/1649 (dispersed). See figure 1. According to B. W. Robinson (*Persian and Mughal Arts of the Book* [London, 1976], no. 55), illustrated pages from this particular manuscript are recognizable by their marginal text columns, which are written on the diagonal.
(iiia) *Shahnama* (1st vol.), dated Jumada II 1064/April-May 1654, Sadruddin Aga Khan Collection (MS. 22). See





9. "Equestrian portrait of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Tabrizi" (facing right), Mu'in Musavvir. Dated 29 July 1685, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 25 x 18 cm. Hashem Khosrovani Collection.

10. "Equestrian portrait of Mirza Muhammad-Taqi Tabrizi" (facing left), Mu'in Musavvir. Dated July 1685, Safavid, Isfahan. Opaque water-colour on paper. 25 x 18 cm. Hashem Khosrovani Collection.

A. Welch, *Collection of Islamic Art: Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan*, 4 vols. (Geneva, 1972-78), vol. 4, IR. MS. 22 (hereafter A. Welch, *SAK*).
(iiib) *Shahnama* (2nd vol.), dated Muharram 1066/November 1655, Chester Beatty Library (MS. 270). See A. J. Arberry, B. W. Robinson, E. Blochet, and J. V. S. Wilkinson, *The Chester Beatty Library, A Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts and Miniatures* (Dublin, 1959-62), MS. 270.
(iv) *Shahnama*, c. 1650-60, Leningrad Public Library (PNS 381). Some of the illustrations are signed by Mu'in. See M. M. Ashrafi, *Persian-Tadjik Poetry in XIV-XVII Century Miniatures* (Dushanbe, 1974), nos. 92-95.
(v) *Shahnama*, 1077/1666-67 (dispersed). See Ernst J. Grube, *Persian Miniature Paintings from the XIII to XIX Century from the Collections in the United States and Canada* (Venice, 1962), nos. 114-16 (hereafter Grube, *PMM*).
11. The best-known illustrated copy of this text is in the British Library (Or. 3248), datable to the 1670s. See Ivan Stchoukine, *Les Peintures des Manuscrits de Shah 'Abbas Ier à la Fin des Safavis* (Paris, 1964), LXVI-LXVII. According to Robert Eng, another copy is in the Negarestan Museum, Tehran. Folios from a dispersed, third copy are in various museums and collections. I am much indebted to Robert Eng for providing me with this information.
12. Marianna S. Simpson, *Arab and Persian Painting in the Fogg Art Museum* (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), no. 35 (hereafter Simpson, *APP*).
13. See note 11.
14. A. Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*, no. 56. Welch is particularly referring to the two-volume *Shahnama* (see note 10, nos. [iiia-b]) and the dispersed copy dated 1666-67, which he has attributed to c. 1650 (see note 10, no. [v]).
15. New York Public Library, Spencer Collection (MS. 6). M. Farhad, "Safavid Single Page Painting 1629-1666" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1987), pp. 123-24, 395. Malek Husayn al-Isfahani also executed the frontispiece for the 1648 *Shahnama* (see note 16). For illustrations see Grube, *PMM*, no. 112; A. Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*, no. 52.
16. Windsor Castle, MS. A/6 Holmes 151. This manuscript includes the work of some of Mu'in's contemporaries such as Muhammad-Yusuf, Muhammad-Qasim, Pir-Muhammad al-Hafiz and Malek Husayn al-Isfahani who was responsible for the frontispiece. For a discussion of the manuscript see B. W. Robinson, "Two manuscripts of the

Shahnama in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle-II: MS Holmes 151 (A/6)," *Burlington Magazine* 110 (March 1968): 133-38.
17. For illustration and discussion see Friedrich Sarre and Eugene Mittwoch, *Die Zeichnungen von Reza 'Abbasi* (München, 1914), no. pl. 47 (hereafter Sarre and Mittwoch, *ZRA*); Esin Atil, *The Brush of the Masters: Drawings from Iran and India* (Washington, DC: the Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, 1978), no. 34.
18. Sarre and Mittwoch (*ZRA*, p. 56) tentatively propose that Mu'in may have meant the "lane of the lining (*astar*) weavers," but in Atil's discussion of the work (*The Brush*, no. 41), the words "lining weavers" (*astar bafan*) have been omitted from the translation. My reading of the inscription tends to confirm Sarre and Mittwoch's suggestion.
19. To my knowledge, Safavid artists always depicted women as idealized types, probably because of their inaccessibility in traditional Persian culture.
20. See the "Day-dreaming youth," *c.* 1590, Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Purchase—Alpheus Hyatt Fund (1952.7). For a discussion and illustration of this work see Simpson, *APP*, no. 30.
21. For the full inscription see Gaston Wiet, *L'Exposition persane de 1931* (Cairo, 1933), no. 25.
22. The word "farzand" refers both to a male and female offspring. However, an older person may also use the apellation "farzand" to call a young man he holds particularly dear. Mu'in also dedicated two other compositions to his so-called sons. His 1673 "Portrait of Riza 'Abbasi" (see text and figure 8) was completed for another "son," Muhammad-Nasir, and in 1663, he executed a drawing of a kneeling man for a third "son," Mirza Qasim Baha. See Stchoukine, *Les Peintures*, p. 66.
23. Since the first publication of this drawing (A. Coomaraswamy, *Les miniatures orientales de la collection Goloubew au Museum of Fine Arts de Boston. Ars Asiatica* 13 [Paris and Brussels, 1929], no. 84), it has been always referred to as the "Lion attacking a youth." In 1974, Professor Oleg Grabar published his translation of the inscription and claimed that according to Professor Bayani, the word referring to the animal may be "babr" (tiger) rather than "shir" (lion) (Oleg Grabar, "Preface," *Iranian Studies, Studies on Isfahan*, Part I, vol. VI, nos. 1-2 [Winter-Spring 1974], p. 12). My own reading of the inscription, which will be published in its entirety elsewhere, confirms this suggestion. Moreover, the stripes on the animal also substantiate the fact that the animal is a tiger rather than a lion.
24. Now in the Freer Gallery of Art. See Sarre and Mittwoch, *ZRA*, pl. 18; Atil, *The Brush*, no. 37 (bottom).
25. Mu'in's earliest individual painting, attributable to *c.* 1648, is the double-page composition of the "Youth in European costume" and the "Young girl." See Toby Falk, ed., *Treasures of Islam* (London, 1985), nos. 90 & 91.
26. Formerly Collection of Edwin Binney, 3rd. See A. Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*, no. 77.
27. Apart from the "Lovers" (Fig. 3), see Sotheby's Sale *Catalogue*, 3rd April 1978, lot 43 for another drawing of a loving couple, dated to 19 Shawwal 1089/4 December 1678. A third composition, painted on 3 Sha'ban 1[0] 98 /15 June 1[6]89, is in the Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore (W. 690). See Grube, *PMM*, no. 121.
28. For a discussion of this concept in Persian painting, see Chahryar Adle, *Ecriture de l'Union, Reflets du temps des troubles, Oeuvre picturale (1083-1124/1673-1712) de Haji Mohammad* (Paris, 1980), pp. 9, 14-15 *passim.*
29. Mu'in's portrait of Hakim Shafa'i (see A. Welch, *SAK*, IR. M. 90) exists in two other versions, an earlier one bearing the name of Riza 'Abbasi (British Museum, 1920-9-17-0298[2]) which served as Mu'in's model and a later one in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Sup. per. 1572, fol. 3) by an anonymous artist.
30. For the portrait of Muhammad-Baqir and his son see ibid., IR. M. 48.
31. The other example that comes to mind is Mir Sayyid 'Ali's portrait of his aged father, Mir Musavvir (*c.* 1565), in the Musée Guimet, Paris. See Stuart Cary Welch, *Wonders of the Age: Masterpieces of Early Safavid Painting, 1501-1576* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), no. 81.
32. A. Welch, *Shah 'Abbas*, no. 76.
33. Stchoukine, *Les Peintures*, p. 90. For illustration see Binyon, Wilkinson, and Gray, *Persian Miniature Painting*, pl. CXII-A. 374.
34. I am most grateful to Dr Chahryar Adle for his suggestions on this problem.
35. The almost similar formal composition in both halves of this double-page painting suggests that one half, probably the right, which tends to be somewhat less detailed, was probably a copy of the composition on the left.
36. For the full text of both inscriptions see Falk, *Treasures*, nos. 96 & 97.
37. This is particularly the case as in most instances Persian artists referred to themselves and their work in rather denigrating ways such as "the humble" (*kamtarin*) or "the slave" (*al-'abd).*
38. Muhammad-Hashim Asif, *Rustam al-Tavarikh*, ed. M. Mushri (Tehran, 1348/1969), pp. 94-96.
39. Ibid., p. 94.

Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani: Master Lacquer Painter

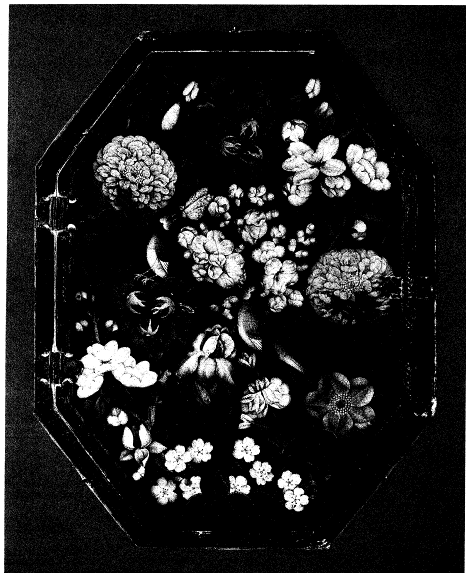
Maryam Ekhtiar

The consecutive reigns in Qajar Iran of Muhammad Shah (1834-48) and Nasir al-Din Shah (1848-96) played a pivotal role in the development of two branches of Persian miniature painting: painted lacquers and enamels. Particularly responsible for bringing these arts to their culmination, in a period generally characterized by stylistic and innovative decline, was the Isfahani family, whose prolific genius was explored in the 1960s and '70s in a series of articles by B. W. Robinson. This study aims to revive interest in the Isfahani family, introduced to modern scholarship by B. W. Robinson, by calling attention to selected works of its most talented member, Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. The article will treat only those works which best represent the three stages of his artistic career.

As with calligraphy, the arts of lacquer and enamel painting were a family tradition in Iran. Muhammad Isma'il was the son of a painter of Isfahan named Aqa Baba, and the younger brother of the eminent lacquer painter Najaf 'Ali of Isfahan whose dated works span 1815-56 and whose signature is found in the form of a punning invocation, "Ya Shah-i-Najaf" or "Oh King of Najaf."[1] Noted for his paintings of scenes of Christian veneration, Najaf 'Ali sought to revive the Safavid and Zand styles long after they had died out.[2] Isma'il's three nephews, Muhammad Kazim, Muhammad Ja'far and Ahmad, were also celebrated lacquer and enamel painters. The enamels produced by Muhammad Kazim, a number of which are housed with the Crown Jewels of Iran, resemble imported Swiss enamels and are among the most exquisite of their kind.

From the outset, Isma'il's brother Najaf 'Ali set the high standards of meticulous technique, minute detail and delicacy of finish which were conveyed to other members of the family.[3] Najaf 'Ali was a student of the renowned eighteenth-century bird and flower painter 'Ali Ashraf whose known works range from the early 1700s to the 1780s.[4] A mirror-case (Fig. 1) covered with *gul-o-bul-bul* or flower and bird designs on a black ground and signed and dated "*Zi ba'd* Muhammad, 'Ali Ashraf, 1165/1751" exemplifies the refined style of this artist and the precise workmanship that inspired Najaf 'Ali and his brother.

A court artist for almost all his working life, 1847-71, Muhammad Isma'il was born about 1814 and died between the years 1882 and 1892.[5] A self-portrait of Muhammad Isma'il on the interior of a pen-box (Fig. 2) notwithstanding,[6] his primary sources of





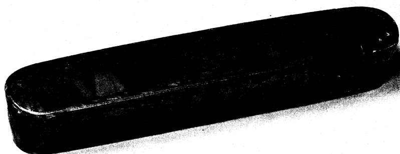
patronage were the shah Nasir al-Din, court officials, and nobles. While Muhammad Isma'il's choice of subject-matter reflects the tastes and desires of his courtly patrons, his signature varies according to the period and his position at court.

Muhammad Isma'il's signature takes numerous forms. The following list of signatures and dates indicates when in his career the particular signature was used: Isma'il, *raqimahu* Isma'il (1264/1848); *'amal* Muhammad Isma'il (1272/1855); *'amal kamtarin* Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi pak baz* (1275/1858); *kamtarin khanazad* Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi* (1278/1861); *Naqqash-bashi* Isma'il, *'amal kamtarin* Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi fi sinna* (1279/1862). Sometimes his signature was even incorporated into rhyming poetry.[7] The title *Naqqash-bashi*, or Painter Laureate, coined by master painters in the court of Fath 'Ali Shah (r. 1797-1834), was current throughout the nineteenth century. As his signatures indicate, Muhammad Isma'il was granted the title before 1858. However, the acceptance of all mid-nineteenth-century lacquers signed "Isma'il" as authentic works of Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani is complicated by the existence of two or more painters with the name Isma'il working at the same time as Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani.[8]

From a corpus of signed and dated pieces one can define three stages in Muhammad Isma'il's career: the early, middle and late years. A pen-case (*qalamdan*) dated 1264/1848 (Fig. 3) is his earliest dated work. It depicts the court of Minuchihr Khan Mu'tamid al-Dawla who was a Georgian eunuch brought back to Iran in 1795 and appointed governor of Isfahan in 1829. According to the *Farsnama-ye-Naseri* Minuchihr Khan, who patronized the Isfahani family, rose through the government ranks. English visitors described his cruelties and the methods of torture he used to punish his subjects.[9] "He believed that the directest road to truth was by torture and that

1. A mirror-case, 'Ali Ashraf. 1165/1751, Zand period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 19.1 x 14.6 cm. The Brooklyn Museum Collection, New York, 88.92.

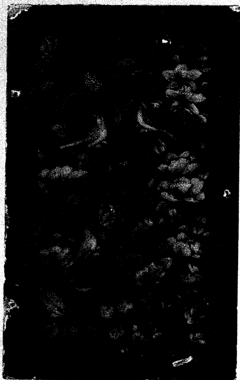
2. A pen-box (detail of the inner face of the lid), signed by Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. (Sold at auction in September 1973). *c.* 1865/66, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. *Highlights of Persian Art* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), Fig. 229.

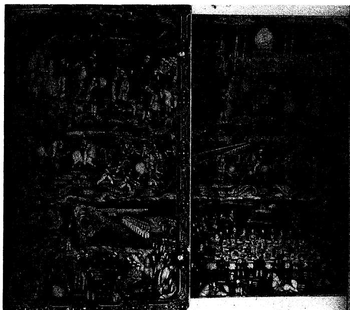


3. A pen-case, signed by Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. 1264/1848, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. By courtesy of the Board of Trustees of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 763-1876.

4. A mirror-case, by Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. *c.* 1264-66/1848-50, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 22.9 x 14 cm. The Brooklyn Museum, New York, 71.49.2.







5. A mirror-case, signed by Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. 1270/1854, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 25.4 x 16.5 cm. *Highlights of Persian Art* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), Fig. 230.

the best adornment for a town square was not a bandstand but a gallows."[10]

Muhammad Isma'il has portrayed Minuchihr Khan, at the centre of the pen-case, in full regalia seated on the floor before a window giving on to a landscape and surrounded by twenty-six court officials. Each figure is a portrait, some inscribed with the name and rank of the person depicted. Among the officials identified are Alijah Suleyman Khan Sarhang, Hajji Mulla Ahmad Nadim, Mirza Davoud Khan, Alijah Mirza Gurgin Khan and Mirza Yusuf.[11] In this conventional composition Muhammad Isma'il has paid particular attention to recreating in minute detail facial features such as beards and waxed moustaches as well as the cloaks with intricately woven brocade sashes. All the figures are also represented wearing hats with slanted tops typical of those of Muhammad Shah's era.

Minuchihr Khan is also portrayed on a casket in the Khalili Collection,[12] in the role of commander-in-chief in a battle between the Arabs and the Iranians. In addition, medallions on the sides of this casket enclose portraits of Minuchihr Khan. Simple poems on the borders of this box describe the scenes and include Isma'il's signature and the date 1266/1850.

A third lacquer object, a mirror-case at the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 4), has on the inner face of the lid a portrait of Minuchihr Khan seated on an elaborately carved and inlaid chair.

The exterior surfaces are covered with birds and flower designs, not necessarily by the same hand as the interior. Unlike the pen-case (Fig. 3) and the casket in the Khalili Collection, this piece is neither signed nor dated. Yet the astonishing resemblance of the portraits of Minuchihr Khan in all three pieces leads us to believe that they were all painted by the same artist, Muhammad Isma'il. The dates, 1264/1848 and 1266/1850, also aid in dating the mirror-case to *c.* 1264-66/1848-50.

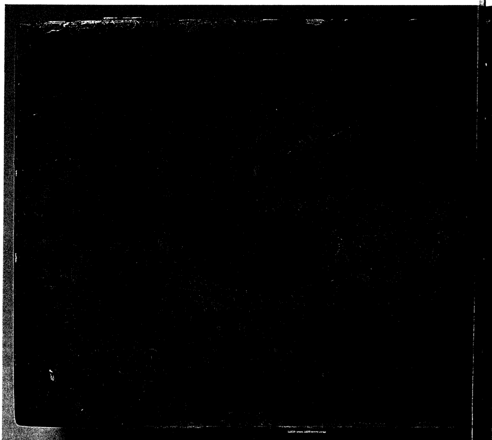
The patronage of Minuchihr Khan Mirza Mu'tamid al-Dawla, governor of Isfahan, distinguishes the early years of Muhammad Isma'il's artistic career before he entered the court of Nasir al-Din Shah and gained the title *Naqqash-bashi* between 1270 and 1275/1854 and 1858. While 1270/1854 can be considered the earliest date for Isma'il's arrival at the court of Nasir al-Din Shah, it also marks the beginning of the middle period of Isma'il's career.

The signatures on two pieces by Isma'il, both dated 1270/1854, *"kamtarin khanazad* Isma'il" and "*'amal-i-kamtarin* Isma'il" (the work of the most humble, Isma'il), suggest that at this time he was patronized by Nasir al-Din Shah but not yet the recipient of the title, *Naqqash-bashi*. The first, signed "*kamtarin khanazad* Isma'il," is a water-colour portrait of Nasir al-Din Shah (British Museum, no. 1947-2-10-01). The existence of at least three other copies of this portrait by Isma'il's contemporaries attests its great success.[13]

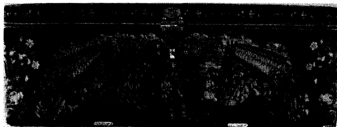
The second work, signed "*'amal-i-kamtarin* Isma'il," is a mirror-case (Fig. 5). This rectangular piece with a hinged cover contains nine scenes framed in gilt scroll-work.[14] Either specially commissioned by a member of the royal family or given by the artist to the king, the mirror-case may have been ordered by Muhammad Shah for his son Nasir al-Din Mirza, heir to the throne. Although some of the scenes cannot be accurately identified, one on the inner face of the cover portrays the meeting of Czar Nicholas I and Prince Nasir al-Din Mirza, aged seven, at Erivan, Armenia in which the Persian Prince is portrayed sitting on the czar's knee. The most interesting scenes depict Persians and Russians strolling outside the walled city of Erivan, a Persian encampment with Russian officers and soldiers dressed in French uniforms, a view of the Cathedral of Etchmiadzin surrounded by priests and worshippers (possibly a fantasy-vision of the cathedral inspired by the Armenian churches of New Julfa, near Isfahan), a view of the city of St Petersburg with a Russian couple in a carriage in the foreground, a feast for the Russian guests, the Czar Nicholas I mounted on horseback with his entourage, and the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II inspecting a detachment of artillery.

As with many of Isma'il's works, the 1270/1854 mirror-case is of both artistic and historical significance. By including five royal portraits, three of the Czar Nicholas I of Russia, Prince Nasir al-Din, and Sultan Mahmud II of Turkey, the artist has attempted to glorify the young prince by association with foreign kings. Not only would the subject-matter befit a gift from Muhammad Shah to his son Nasir al-Din Mirza, but also the paintings demonstrate remarkable imagination, stylistic complexity and a high degree of artistic refinement. The compositions reveal an attempt to employ perspective, suggesting perhaps Russian influence in the rendering of the figures, landscape and architecture. Miniscule figures appear in rows and clusters often arranged symmetrically to create harmonious compositions. The 1854 mirror-case is an example of Isma'il's increasing tendency towards a westernized style, which earned him the epithet "farangi-saz" or "Europeanizer."

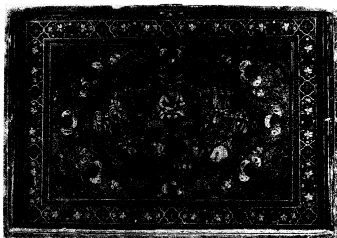
The first known piece signed "*'amal-i-kamtarin* Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*" (the work of the most humble Isma'il, Painter Laureate) is a pen-case dated 1275/1858 with a



6. A casket (outer view of the lid), signed "Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*." 1865, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 32.3 x 26.3 x 11.6 cm. Bern Historical Museum, 71/1913.



7. A casket (front view), signed "Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*." 1865, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 32.3 x 26.3 x 11.6 cm. Bern Historical Museum, 71/1913. Photo: S. Rebsamen.



8. A casket (inner surface of the lid), signed "Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*." 1865, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 32.3 x 26.3 x 11.6 cm. Bern Historical Museum, 71/1913. Photo: S. Rebsamen.

figure of a woman in European dress surrounded with bird and flower designs.[15] While the precise date on which Isma'il received the title "Naqqash-bashi" is unknown, from 1275/1858 onwards, Isma'il's signed lacquers regularly included the new title.

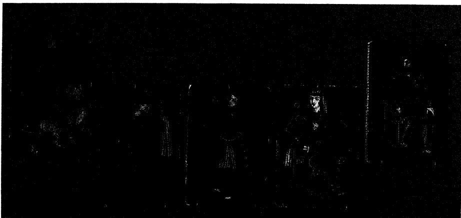
In the third and final stage of his career, Muhammad Isma'il painted three of his most exquisite pieces. A casket of 1865, signed "Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*," in the Bern Historical Museum is considered a masterpiece. Inscriptions indicate that the top surface of the lid (Fig. 6) is an aerial view of Muhammad Shah's siege of Herat in 1837-38. Although one would expect a battle scene with hundreds of tiny figures packed into a small area to be disorderly and chaotic, the army in the "Siege of Herat" is arranged in a coherent programme of symmetrical diagonals. The perfect balance of this extraordinary composition suggests that the artist must have used numerous sketches and preliminary studies. Despite the use of westernizing techniques such as perspective and modelling, the high horizon and bird's-eye view indicate the inspiration of Persian miniature painting in this scene.

The front and back surfaces of Isma'il's 1865 casket portray additional scenes from the "Siege of Herat," as well as those of the Persian bombardment of Ghorian in 1837-38 and Muhammad Shah's campaigns against the Turkomans (Fig. 7). Dressed in military attire, Muhammad Shah is depicted either on horseback or standing next to his troops on the sides and top of the casket. On the interior surface of the lid he is enthroned, surrounded by court officials, and executed in larger scale than in the other scenes (Fig. 8). Included in this conventional composition of the king enthroned in the centre of rows of standing courtiers is a full-length portrait of Muhammad Shah's vizier, Hajji Mirza Aghasi. Known to be corrupt, ignorant, and fanatical[16] Hajji Mirza Aghasi had also been portrayed in 1262/1846 by Mirza Baba al-Husayni, a leading Qajar artist. Historical scenes and that of Muhammad Shah's court are enclosed in medallions framed with finely painted floral designs and arabesques and marked with tiny inscriptions alluding to the events illustrated. Inscriptions on the front and back of this casket state that it was commissioned by Nasir al-Din Shah in memory of his father Muhammad Shah.

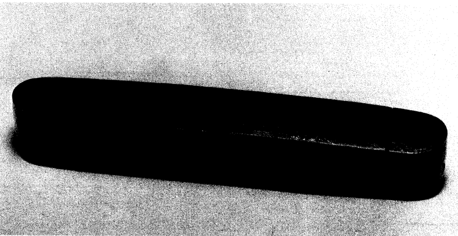
Muhammad Isma'il's numerous lacquer mirror-cases and pen-boxes reveal a fascination with portraiture. A set of twenty unsigned painted lacquer playing cards in the Brooklyn Museum (Fig. 9) includes five cards bearing the portrait of Muhammad Shah in official dress seated on an elaborately carved chair. Although these cards cannot be attributed to Muhammad Isma'il himself, the accurate rendering of Muhammad Shah's facial features and details of his costume suggests a familiarity with Isma'il's late portraits of the shah. On the basis of their stylistic similarity to a mirror-case of 1865 signed by Muhammad Isma'il, these playing cards are datable to *c.* 1865 and attributable to an artist in Isma'il's circle.

A pen-case signed by Muhammad Isma'il and dated 1283/1866 (Fig. 10) juxtaposes two different subjects on the same surface: the amorous adventures of Bahram Gur from the poetic romance "Haft Paykar" or "Seven Effigies" of the *Khamseh* written by the twelfth-century poet Nizami; and the Virgin and Child. This curious juxtaposition, not uncomman on late Qajar painted lacquers, implies that Persian artists such as Isma'il did not ascribe a religious interpretation to the Christian figures. Rather, Isma'il must have intended to express the ideals of feminine beauty and motherhood embodied in this Christian theme.

After a five-year interval Isma'il executed his last known dated piece, of 1288/1871 and signed "Muhammad Isma'il *Naqqash-bashi*" (Fig. 11), now in the Bern Historical



9. Playing cards (five). *c.* 1865, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. 6 x 4 cm.
The Brooklyn Museum Collection, New York, X274a-e.



10. A pen-case, signed by Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani. 1283/1866, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché.
23.5 x 4 x 4.2 cm. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, 67.3.

Museum. Interlacing gold scroll-work and floral designs cover the back and exterior surfaces. The inner surface of the cover, however, bears the haloed portrait of ʿAli, the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad, holding his forked sword Zu'l-Fiqar. Inspired by a painting[17] by Abu'l Hasan Ghaffari who studied in Italy between 1846 and 1850, Ismaʿil's composition shows ʿAli surrounded with drawings of cupids and angels rendered in Western fashion. Below ʿAli, his sons Imam Hasan and Hussein are portrayed with draped head-dresses. Robinson has identified the two figures on either side of ʿAli as Abu Talib, ʿAli's father, and the Abyssinian Bilal, one of the first Muslims appointed to give the call to prayer.[18] Additional figures and angels enclosed in medallions, some surrounded with gilt scroll-work, frame the composition. Above ʿAli are three such medallions. Two, on each side, contain angels, while the central medallion contains a miniature scene of the Prophet's night journey to Heaven, the *Miʿraj*.

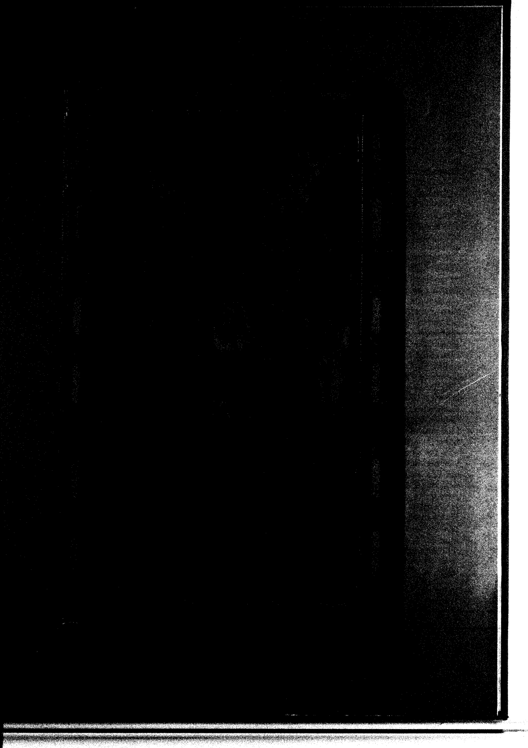
This composition has been referred to as an "Islamic altar-piece" since it owes much to the influence of large European altar-pieces or works directly derived from them. An example is the altar-piece in the Church of St Nersus in New Julfa dated 1724, perhaps known to Muhammad Ismaʿil.[19] Similar to the Virgin in the altar-piece, ʿAli is depicted with a halo and surrounded by attendants. Prominent Muslim religious figures stand below and to either side of ʿAli just as Christian saints flank the Virgin. Both the altar-piece and the mirror-case portray crowning elements, the Holy Trinity and the *Miʿraj*, respectively.

The 1871 mirror-case is the most fascinating of Ismaʿil's painted works because of its Shiʿite Muslim subject-matter. Here, ʿAli is accompanied by Hasan and Hussein along with significant figures in Shiʿte theology. The rectangular border contains ten couplets of rhyming poetry praising ʿAli. The simplicity of the poetry as well as the inclusion of the name of the patron and often his intentions for the object, lead us to believe that lines of poetry such as the following were written expressly for the particular object perhaps by the court poet. The ten couplets read: "This is the portrait of the Lord of Divine Truth, friend of God/He is a mirror reflecting God/ʿAli is the reflection of Divine Truth and revelation of the secret of Divine Creation/His grace and virtue bestow light to the sun/He is the painter of Earth and Heaven/Although he is not the essence of God, his soul is as pure as the pearls of Heaven/He is a source of honour and dignity enlightening even the Heavenly Angels/He is brave, even the dragons flee at the sight of his sword/Nasir al-Din Shah has the fortune of seeing his beautiful countenance/Grace be to him and may the evil eye always be remote from him." Although the theme of this painting pertains to Islam and Shiʿism, the manner of rendition is clearly Western. This was largely due to an influx of European prints which continued to make their way into Iran at this time. Features, such as haloes, angels, and cupids, are given volume and three dimensionality through the use of light and shade. Attention to the folds and creases of garments, the use of gilt rococo scroll-work and the Christian altar-inspired composition all contribute to the Western flavour of this piece.

11. A mirror-case (inner view), signed by Muhammad Ismaʿil Isfahani. 1288/1871, Qajar period. Painted lacquer on papier mâché. Bern Historical Museum, 73/1913.

Commentary

The preceding discussion of six pieces by Muhammad Ismaʿil Isfahani traces his stylistic development from his earliest dated piece of 1264/1848 to his last dated piece of



1288/1871. Clearly Isma'il tailored his painted works to suit the preferences of his various courtly patrons. They influenced not only his choice of subject-matter but also the stylistic and compositional features of his paintings. Despite these restraints, his paintings reveal an innovative and uninhibited spirit. His intellectual interest in westernizing themes and his openness to experimentation with a broad spectrum of foreign and domestic styles and subjects are exhibited in his painting.

Isma'il's fascination with portraiture echoes a general Qajar tendency to move away from the uniform figures of classical miniature painting and towards individualized, unique portraits. The introduction of photography in mid-nineteenth-century Iran may have served as a catalyst for this new portraiture. Isma'il concentrated on portraiture throughout his career, varying contexts and styles in each period.

In his earliest period, Isma'il's portraits of Minuchihr Khan Mu'tamid al-Dawla are formal, with figures painted in large-scale, full-length poses. Compositions are conventional and highly ordered (cf. Fig. 3), and the figures possess an almost photographic quality.

Under the patronage of Nasir al-Din Shah, Isma'il became increasingly daring. Demonstrating his imaginative powers in the 1854 mirror-case (Fig. 5), Isma'il mixed fact and fantasy in many scenes by placing portraits in fictitious contexts. Here Isma'il's approach to portraiture differs considerably from the earliest pieces; although portraits are included, they are not always the focal point of the composition. This is true to an even greater extent in the 1865 casket depicting the siege of Herat (Fig. 6). The endless number of tiny figures painted with awe-inspiring precision and the density of the compositions with their sweeping aerial views of an historical event immediately shift the viewer's focus from the portrait of Muhammad Shah and to the momentous historical event depicted. Even Isma'il's approach to history was occasionally unconventional. Not only did he document the history of his own time, but he also frequently depicted events from the age of Nasir al-Din Shah's predecessor and father, Muhammad Shah. While Nasir al-Din Shah wanted thus to revive the memory of his father, Isma'il demonstrated an interest in visually connecting the events of the present with the recent past.

In his last pieces Isma'il showed a flair for taking traditional subjects such as Muslim and Christian themes and rendering them in untraditional ways. The pen-case (Fig. 10) depicting Bahram Gur and the Virgin exhibits a playful, almost ironic approach, juxtaposing two such disparate subjects. His last dated piece which shows 'Ali flanked by cherubim (Fig. 11) is even humorous in effect and strikingly Western.

Muhammad Isma'il Isfahani's achievements contributed to the refinement of lacquer painting during the mid-Qajar period and far surpassed those of his contemporaries in aesthetic quality and stylistic complexity. Isma'il's works can be viewed as historical documents, but beyond simply recording historical events, his lacquers celebrated them. In short, Isma'il's artistic vision broke the boundaries of the small objects on which he painted.

NOTES

1. Richard Ettinghausen and Ehsan Yarshater, *Highlights of Persian Art* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1979), p. 364.
2. Layla S. Diba, "Lacquerwork," *The Arts of Persia*, ed. R. W. Ferrier (New Haven, 1989), p. 245.
3. Two examples of Najaf 'Ali's late works are in the Mahboubian Collection. Mehdi Mahboubian, *Treasures of Persian Art after Islam: The Mahboubian Collection* (New York, 1970); and Diba, "Lacquerwork," p. 249.
4. Mahboubian, *Treasures*, p. 19.
5. This biographical information has been drawn from: B. W. Robinson, "A Lacquer Mirror Case of 1854,"

Iran, 5 (1967): 1; and Muhammad Karimzaded Tabrizi, *Ahwal va Asar-i-Naqqashan-i-Qadim-i-Iran* (London: Interlink Longraph Ltd., 1985), pp. 67-68.
6. Photograph taken from: Ettinghausen and Yarshater, *Highlights of Persian Art,* fig. 229.
7. Tabrizi, *Ahwal va,* pp. 67-68.
8. Robinson, "A Lacquer Mirror Case of 1854," p. 2.
9. B. W. Robinson, "Qajar Lacquer," paper presented at the 1987 Symposium at The Brooklyn Museum entitled: *The Art and Culture of Qajar Iran,* p. 4.
10. Ibid.
11. Tabrizi, *Ahwal va,* p. 68.
12. Ibid., pp. 68-69.
13. Robinson, "A Lacquer Mirror Case of 1854," p. 3.
14. Information on this piece has been drawn from: Robinson, "A Lacquer Mirror Case of 1854."
15. Tabrizi, *Ahwal va,* p. 69.
16. Toby Falk, ed., *Treasures of Islam* (London: Sotheby's/Philip Wilson Publishers, 1985).
17. Presently at the Museum of Decorative Arts, Tehran. B. W. Robinson, "Persian Lacquer in The Bern Historical Museum" *Iran,* vol. VIII (1970).
18. Ibid., p. 49.
19. Francis Guy Bondurant, "Persian Lacquer Pen Cases of the Qajar Period" (Master's thesis, CUNY Hunter College, New York, July 1974), p. 57.

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